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## DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Ethnography of the Kumbheśvara temple compound in  
Lalitpur (Patan), Nepal. Architecture, Iconography and  
Interaction within a sacred Landscape.”

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Dedicated to: Krishna Bahadur Gurung,  
Sudeep Kr. Khadgi  
and my parents.

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<sup>2</sup> © Khadgi, Sudeep Kr.

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<sup>4</sup> Fig. 43-47: © Khadgi, Sudeep Kr.

<sup>5</sup> © Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> © Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> © Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.gpgrieve.org/3maps/map\\_valley.jpg](http://www.gpgrieve.org/3maps/map_valley.jpg) (07.02.2011)

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<sup>11</sup> Gutschow 1982:19

## Orthography and transliteration

I use for the present work the spelling of written Nepali and follow the diction of Turners lexicon.<sup>12</sup> As distinguished from spoken Nepali, I spell out the inherent vowel “a”, which accompanies unmarked consonants in Devanāgarī script. This means, for example, that I write Paśupatinātha instead of Paśupatināth. Concerning transliteration I decided to limit the excessive use of diacritical marks in order to prevent a constant irritation of reading fluency. The following categories of words are thus rendered without diacritical marks and refer to the international diction: Historical personalities, the names of authors, oral sources and place names of Nepal and India. I also excluded words from transliteration that have already entered English usage, such as Himalaya, Hindu, linga, puja, tantrism, Brahman and more.

## Dates

The official calendar of Nepal today is the Vikram Samvat (VS), which began 57 BCE. The indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley sometimes also use the Nepal Samvat (NS) calendar, which began in 879 CE. Where I have not accompanied the dates with letters the year is to be understood as AD. As the Gregorian calendar, the Vikram Samvath consists of twelve months: Vaiśākh (which begins around April and marks the first month of the year), Jyeṣṭh, Āṣāḍh, Śrāvaṇ, Bhādra, Āśvin, Kārttik, Mārga, Pauṣ, Māgh, Phāgun, Caitra. They are calculated both according to the solar and to the lunar cycle. While the solar calendar is used for official purposes, the lunar calendar generally determines religious events.

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<sup>12</sup> Turner, Ralph L. 2007. *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language*. New Delhi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present work sets out to illuminate the artefactual landscape of the Kumbheśvara temple compound, which is situated in the Nepalese city of Lalitpur. It takes the form of a classic ethnography, focussing specifically on architecture, iconography and interaction between the local visitors and the god-images of the compound. Its main source was anthropological fieldwork in Lalitpur, which offered an insight into the current local perception of the compound.

### 1.1. Personal access and development of the subject matter

Before conducting my first trip to Nepal in February 2010, I had the intention to compare religious objects with the ones exhibited inside a museum. My aim was to compile the local perception of the artefacts situated within the Patan Museum and compare it with the ones found inside the *sanctum* of a temple in order to illuminate the encounter of two distinguished conceptions of meanings concerning objects within different contextual spaces. Soon, however, I found myself in front of a puzzling realization: for the main part of Lalitpur's inhabitants, the objects within the museum have little or no value at all. An old Newar who used to work a piece of land as a farmer and now spends his pension sitting in front of the main entrance of the museum- a popular spot to meet and chat with people - cut to the chase: "I have never been inside the museum. Why should I go? There is no [spiritual] work for me there. I go every morning to the temple and worship Bagalāmukhī; this is my holy work. The statues inside the museum are all rubbish, because nobody is allowed to worship them. They have no power anymore. So why should I go?" (Shrestha 2010)<sup>13</sup> I realised that I had to make some crucial transformations concerning my thesis. His statements made it clear that to many people of the region the museal concept is something completely alien. It is thus no coincidence that most visitors to the museum are foreigners, or curious scholars who belong to the small intellectual elite of the region. Especially in a city like Lalitpur, where you can walk on the street and find the same statues venerated by

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<sup>13</sup> Shrestha, Sameer Bahadur, personal conversation, 15th of February 2010, Lalitpur.

people around the corner of the museum, it seems absurd to see these same images behind glass cabinets, labelled as “art”. I chose to move away from the museum and towards the temple compound where the said goddess Bagalāmukhī is situated. I decided to focus entirely on sacred objects and buildings in order to find out about the nature of these venerated artefacts. To sustain the potential of revealing certain qualities that are responsible for the nature of a sacred landscape through the comparison with museum exhibits, however, I kept the initial idea in mind. In lieu of the museal space, I incorporated an important element into my question: the interaction between a sacred statue and a person standing in front of it. Many art historians working on sacred objects do not consider this relation and are thus not capable of explaining the reason for the sacredness of god-images and their powers. By examining the phenomenon of interaction due to the “liveliness” of images I will consider this question in the course of the present work.

My first visit to Nepal in February 2010 thus served me to form my subject. The research question as well as the hypothesis I developed before visiting the country were modified and reshaped by the local reality I encountered in Lalitpur during my abidance of eight weeks. I returned to Lalitpur in August 2010 in order to conduct a fieldwork to gather the data for the present thesis. I stayed in Nepal another six weeks; the final days I spent in the middle hills of the Himalayas, to visit the lake of Gosaikund, which, as I will show later, is of considerable importance for the temple compound. My accommodation was situated within the Kuntī district, the area of the temple compound and I was therefore able to visit in a regular fashion. I witnessed the daily worship (puja) of the locals and usually stayed until eleven, or twelve o’clock, when the last devotees came to pay their everyday tribute to the gods. After a few days of fieldwork I started to introduce myself to some members of the temple compound. I explained my intention to write a diploma thesis about the temple and quickly received a warm welcome. Madhav Shyam Sharma, the main priest of the compound told me that he was happy to know that the knowledge about the deities within the compound will be spread over the boarders of Nepal. He therefore gladly offered me his help whenever I needed it.

## 1.2. Research question and methodology

The objective of this research is to provide a detailed ethnography of the Kumbheśvara

temple compound and to conduct an interpretation on the basis of its objects, temples and shrines in order to explore the qualities of a sacred landscape and the means by which it becomes considered as “holy” and thus “efficient”. The present work thus offers a new insight into the sacred geography of the temple compound by composing an ethnography focussing on living objects, an ethnography of an animated space, which “lives” through the interaction with its visitors. On the basis of these findings and in the course of observations and interviews, the following research question was developed:

*What role does the material content (such as god-images, temples and shrines) of the Kumbheśvara temple compound play for the development of a sacred space and what can it reveal about the nature of a venerated artifact?*

The question is based on three main hypotheses. First of all, a material statue of a deity, it does not matter whether iconic or aniconic, serves as a body for the specific god or goddess it depicts and can thus be considered as present, as long as it is being worshipped regularly. Secondly, during the process of veneration the devotee has a certain form of personal relationship with the material god image; a formal act of communication is taking place between them. Third, the way these divine artefacts are perceived can change throughout the course of time. These changes are directly connected with the socio-political surrounding of human actors and their distribution of power.

The fieldwork, which based on participant observation and informal interviews, served to examine the development of a relation between the objects and the visitors and members of the temple compound. The information gathered through participant observation and informal interviews was collected in a field diary, which served as raw material for the final interpretations. Furthermore semi-structured interviews were conducted with the main priest of the temple compound, namely Madhav Shyam Sharma, with the local scholar Nutan Sharma and with two local Citrakārs, members of the Newar caste of craftsmen and painters.

Most of the informal talks and interviews were carried out in English, which led to certain difficulties, since not only were many of the conversational partners intimidated by the situation of speaking with a student who has a western background, but also having to use a foreign language triggered a feeling of insecurity and prevented free verbal

expression. To ameliorate this situation, local inhabitants helped with the translation of several conversations and interviews, which led to a satisfying outcome.

A self-made map served as additional support for the participant observation. It provided an overview of the spatial arrangement of the sacred objects, shrines and temples within the compound. Furthermore it facilitated to focus on all kinds of paths that are theoretically possible to walk within the compound and to compare them with the routes the visitors than actually take in practise. By noting down which objects are frequented and how long people remain there and what actions they perform, it was possible to work out consistent patterns of behaviour and their underlying meaning. Another important method in the course of fieldwork was photography. All sacred artefacts within the compound were documented with the help of a camera in order to provide the reader a visual source of information. Not long ago the field of anthropology had an ambiguous relationship towards the “new media”. It was not considered to be a scientifically acceptable qualitative examination method or rather it was not perceived as a self-contained theme of investigation. Photographs were only understood as describing resources, as illustration. According to Thomas Overdick at least since the writing culture debate and the seek for new research methods and tools for presenting the data and results in a multivocal way, visual media such as photography got a new chance within anthropology as a fully accepted part of the discipline<sup>14</sup>. Nowadays photography and film are considered as acceptable methodological instruments and there are hardly ethnographers, who do not bring a camera into their field.

For the purpose of the present work the camera and photographs were used for three major purposes:

1. To offer a visual, pictorial insight into the place of concern.
2. To use it as a means to get to know local visitors.
3. To use photographs during interviews and informal talks as a basis for communication.

The fieldwork thus evolved within a multi-methodological approach in order to strive for a holistic insight. The distinct methods overlapped regularly and were not bound to any chronological order, because they aimed to be led as much as possible by the field and its inhabitants instead of imposing a prefabricated structure over the place and its people. This research has an exploratory scope and does not claim at any part to make a generalized

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<sup>14</sup> Overdick 2004: 20ff.

statement, but rather forms a subjective view on local perceptions and current developments.

### 1.3. Structure of the thesis and secondary literature

The structure of the present work follows the intention to show the vitality of a sacred space. It starts with the description of the field and its mere artefacts and architecture and then crosses over into the question of how an interaction between images and devotees becomes possible before finally culminating into the annual ceremony of the Kumbheśvara fair (*melā*). The presented chapters can be seen as divided into two major parts: the first one focuses on the material and socio-religious aspects of the compound and its environment. An introduction about the city of Lalitpur will introduce the setting of the fieldwork. Subsequently the socio-religious organisation of the Newars, who are believed to be the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, will be presented as their cults and traditions have had a strong impact on the compound until today. The chapters will trace their history and caste system with a special focus on the traditional Newar caste of butchers, who settled long ago around the area of the Kumbheśvara temple compound. A major division based on religious belief within the Newar caste system will be demonstrated, respectively the hierarchical structure between *śivamārgī* and *buddhamārgī*, the ones who “follow the path of Śiva” and the ones who “follow the path of Buddha”, will be explained. Concerning ritual practise, however, the boarders between thos two paths are porous, which led to an entanglement of both religious traditions. In this chapter a certain hierarchy will be emphasized, which was established among the different gods and goddesses of the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon. Hinduism, as will become apparent, has always been the religion of the rulers and kings and thus the dominant tradition. Subsequently the legendary origin of the Kumbheśvara temple compound will be investigated more closely as well as its connection with the historical foundation of Lalitpur. A map and a detailed description of the temple compound and its objects will be provided, which offers an additional insight into the place of concern and a possibility of better orientation. It will show how these objects are ordered after a specific cosmological pattern and, together with the traditional architecture, form a religious microcosm, or model of the universe, which follows old schemes of spatial order. With the example of the popular shrine of the tantric goddess Bagalāmukhī the metamorphosis of indigenous gods and goddesses, such as the

local “mothers” and “grandmothers” (*māts* and *ajimās*), into deities of more respectable international standing, Buddhist or Brahmanical will be demonstrated. The goddess’ recent ascension of status will be traced as well as her story of success in order to show that the power of images is closely connected with the socio-political structure of power distributed among the people interacting with them. With a short excursus into the formal practise of consecrating objects the first part of the present work will be completed. The subsequent chapter concerns the interactive relationship between worshipper and god-image and will examine more closely what happens during the process of veneration with the example of the particular relationship between the main priest and the Sarveśvara icon, the central sanctum of the main temple. Since the phenomenon of image worship has been a topic of severe misunderstanding and dispute, this chapter will be closed with some classic examples of criticism levelled by “occidental” Christendom and Hinduism. Finally the last chapter will trace the meaning of the central sanctum of the Kumbheśvara temple and its historical metamorphosis with a detailed description of the annual Kumbheśvara fair (*melā*) and demonstrate the transformation of meaning among venerated objects on the basis of an ancient cult, which circulates around the interior pond of the Kumbheśvara temple compound.

This diploma thesis emerged out of both the results of the fieldwork and out of the study of secondary literature, focussing especially on works by the anthropologists Gérard Toffin<sup>15</sup> and David Gellner<sup>16</sup> as well as on works by the art historian Mary Slusser<sup>17</sup>. For the interpretation of the phenomenon of interaction between people and god-images the theory of the “Art Nexus” which forms part of Alfred Gell’s theory of the Anthropology of Art<sup>18</sup> was applied. This theory provides an alternative to western thought, which tends to regard an art object as something that is controlled by the artist. The author demonstrates that other models of treatment and contemplation exist in different cultures. It will be shown later that the practise of *darśana*, serves as basic principle of the idea that images possess a certain “agency”. Gell’s abstract ideas support the present research by showing what kind of power god-images have and how they shape and create the sacred space. In this regard, the theory

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<sup>15</sup> Most notably: Toffin, Gérard. 2008. *Newar Society. City, Village and Periphery*. Kathmandu.

<sup>16</sup> Most notably: Gellner, David. 1992. *Monk, householder, and tantric priest. Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*. Cambridge.

<sup>17</sup> Most notably: Slusser, Mary. 1982. *Nepal Mandala. A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. Princeton.

<sup>18</sup> Gell, Alfred. 1992. *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford.

of the *Bildakt* (“image-act”) developed by the German art historian Horst Bredekamp is based on a similar idea. He defines the latter as a special form of the “speech-act” as framed out by John L. Austin in 1962<sup>19</sup>. While in the “speech-act” words and gestures become a self-actuating being in the exterior space of language, the “image-act” diverts the impetus into the exterior space of artefacts. Through this operation an exchange with the image becomes possible and it can execute an effect on the sentiment, the mental activity and on the following actions of its perceiver. (Bredekamp 2010: 48-56)

Most of the interviews were conducted with the temples’ priests and members. The majority belongs to a higher caste within the Newar community and it is therefore important to underline the fact that their point of view differs from the one of other groups and castes. Especially when concerning the relation to blood sacrifice there is a great distinction to be made between the upper and the lower Newar classes as will be shown later. It is necessary to emphasize this, because secondary literature often emanates from Sanskrit texts and thus has a strong Brahmanical perspective, which can later dominate the descriptions. This leads to a high danger of superimposing these viewpoints on everything else. It therefore has to be made clear that there are not only distinctions between the several caste-groups among the Newars, but also between visitors referring to themselves as *buddhamārgī* and *śivamargī* and of course among caste groups outside of the Newar system. Buddhists sometimes recognize the same statue as a completely different god or goddess than a Hindu. It therefore has to be underlined that the following account of the Kumbheśvara temple compound is mostly defined by the Brahmanical point of view, with a special regard to the complexity and plurality incorporated within the compound. Certain crucial differences between the perceptions of several groups of people, however, are considered, especially in chapter 5, which examines the seasonal celebrations during the Kumbheśvara *melā*, an important festival that annually attracts a large number of visitors from all over the region.

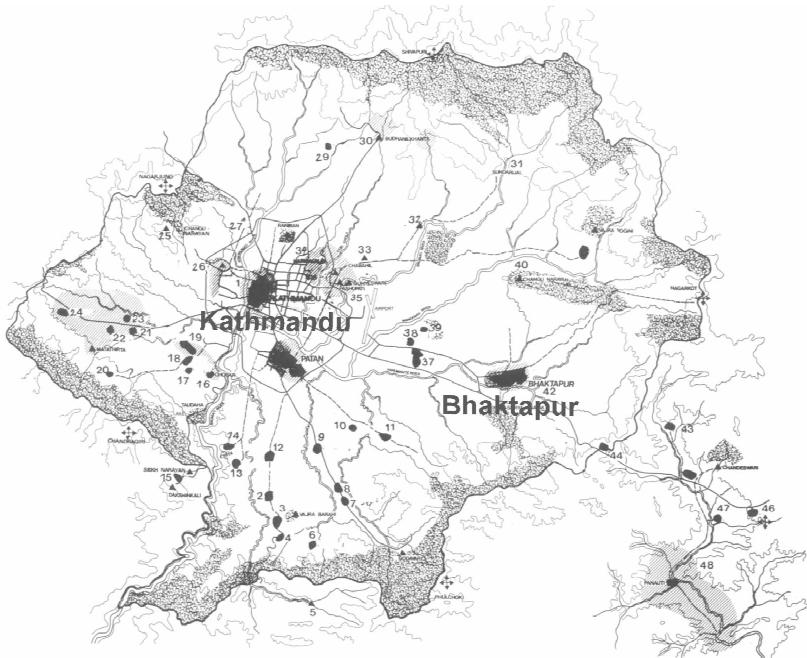
While for many spectators the objects within the compound are sacred living beings, the formal aspects differ in a variety of ways. There are more perspectives than the ones presented in this work, but including all of them would have been out of proportion with regard to the formal scope of the present thesis. The following ethnography thus offers a subjective ethnographical insight into the Kumbheśvara temple compound with an emphasis

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<sup>19</sup> Austin, John L. 1962. *How to do Things with Words*. Cambridge.

on the brahmanical point of view based on personal encounters during the time of the conducted fieldwork in Lalitpur from August to September 2010.

## 2. THE CITY OF LALITPUR AND ITS INHABITANTS



Map 1. The Kathmandu Valley<sup>20</sup>

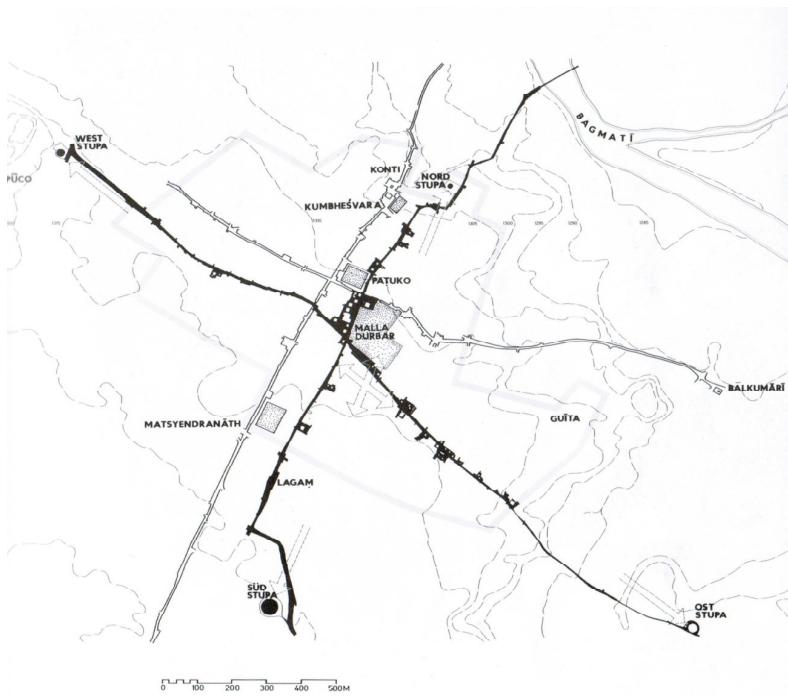
Of all the cities and settlements within the Kathmandu Valley, the three capitals of the former kingdoms, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur (Patan), are the most important. These cities are old settlements founded by the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, the Newars, and stand out for their urban character. Their traditional architecture and town planning has been applied to even the smallest villages of the surrounding area in the form of temples, squares and community buildings. The area of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, where the two largest rivers of the Valley the Bagmati and the Vishnumati meet, is the most densely populated. Through its vast expansion due to economic development in the post-Rana period, Kathmandu absorbed and incorporated most of the villages and towns surrounding it. The city of Lalitpur is situated only a few Kilometres southeast of Kathmandu and inhabits approximately 60 000 people. Even though the borders of Kathmandu and Lalitpur already merge together, the latter formally still remains a distinct city with the official title: "Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan city".

Lalitpur is known under three different names: First of all as "Lalitpur", predominantly

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.gpgrieve.org/3maps/map\\_valley.jpg](http://www.gpgrieve.org/3maps/map_valley.jpg) (07.02.2011)

used by the inhabitants of the city and therefore also the denomination chosen for the present work. “Lalitpur” used to be the formal name during the Malla Period and literally means “beautiful city”. The Newar population of the city call it “Yala”. The origin of this Newari denomination is not certain, but potentially comes from the Sanskrit name “Yūpagrāma”, which means “village of the sacred pillar”, or “village of the sacrificial post” and which used to be the most important settlement during the Licchavi period, situated around what later became the central Durbar Square and its southern extensions. (Slusser 1982:97) The social anthropologist David Gellner stresses that the name actually derived from the word “yalasi”, which is the notation of the tall poles that are used for different kinds of festivals. (Gellner 1996:131) The author also stresses, however, that some of the locals believe the name actually derives from a former Kirāta King called Yellung or Yalambara, who supposedly founded the city and the Dynasty of the Kirāta, the potential indigenes of the Valley. Finally, the cities’ name mostly used by foreign scholars is “Patan,” an abbreviation of “Lalitapattana.” It derived from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was used by the Malla kings, to communicate with the Nepali speaking representatives of Gorkha, a hill state in the western part of the Valley and birthplace of Prithvi Narayan Shah, who conquered the Kathmandu Valley in the first half of the eighteenth century. (Slusser 1982:96-98)

From all the three former royal capital cities, Lalitpur is the one with the highest number of Buddhist artefacts and institutions such as *vihāras*, *stūpas*, *caityas* and other objects or places of veneration that refer to a long tradition of Lalitpur as a Buddhist town. The city is surrounded by four *stūpas* that mark the endpoints of the street crossing, which can be drawn through the city with the former palace on Durbar Square in its centre (Map 2). The four *stūpas* also “embody” the cardinal directions and thus define the urban space and its architectural/material environment. When looking more closely on the map, another street crossing can be discovered, parallel to the one mentioned above. It is very likely that the newly established order was connected with the shifting of the new rulers’ domicile. The north-south axis of the former street crossing is pulled through the Kuntī area in the north, where the Kumbheśvara temple compound is situated and through the famous Matsyendranātha temple in the south. The shrine of Bālakumārī in the east and the Pūco-hill in the west define the east-west axis. These two street crossings form the scaffold into which the rest of the streets slowly merged.



Map 2. Lalitpur City: Four *stūpas*, primary and secondary street cross<sup>21</sup>

The city is traditionally divided into 24 districts (*tol*). These districts are named after squares, important monasteries, after their location (for example former town centres such as Kuntī), or after old neighbourhoods. Subordinated places are called after fountains (*hīti*), groups of houses (New. *chem*), courtyards (*nani*) or in some rare cases after the Newari word for district (New. *tvā*). (Gutschow 1982: 156-159) All these districts used to be united within old city walls that marked the boarders of the inner city. The course of the wall cannot be reconstructed entirely anymore, but the traditional order of settlements can still be grasped by the social affiliation of the local inhabitants, as will be shown in a later chapter. The city of Lalitpur is thus strongly structured after an ancient system of order, which orientates itself with divine or royal sites. Like most of the cities within the Kathmandu Valley there is a big number of Hindu and Buddhist shrines and temples covering most of the districts. In the newer, western parts of the city, modernization has taken place and many old buildings have been replaced by concrete housing. The area north and south of the Durbar Square, however, remains relatively untouched.

<sup>21</sup> Gutschow 1982:155

## 2.1. Socio-religious context of the Newars

The first comprehensive piece of research on Newars appeared in 1923 by Professor K.P. Chattopadhyaya. He wrote an essay called “*History of the Newar Culture*,”<sup>22</sup> which formed a collection of facts gathered from scattered publications. Many years later Dilli Raman Regmi wrote his work “*The Antiquity of the Newars of Kathmandu*,”<sup>23</sup> but it was only after Gopal Singh Nepali published his full-length book “*The Newars. An Ethno- Sociological Study of a Himalayan Community*” in 1965 that a growing number of anthropologists started to focus on the Newar communities. Since the majority of families who live in the region of the Kumbheśvara temple compound are Newars, a brief introduction into the history and socio-religious organisation of this ethnic group based on the writings of Gopal Singh Nepali<sup>24</sup>, Mary Slusser<sup>25</sup>, David N. Gellner<sup>26</sup> and Toffin<sup>27</sup> will be provided in this chapter.

The Newars are considered to be the oldest inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. The word “Newar”, so it is generally assumed, derived from the word „Nepal“ and referred to the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, especially concerning the indigenous groups. (Slusser 1982:9) It was only in 1654, however, that their name was first mentioned in the remaining scriptures, discovered by Regmi in 1966. Nowadays the people who identify themselves as “Newar” compose less than half of the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. According to the 2001 consensus they do not form the majority of the Kathmandu Valley as they used to in the 1950ies anymore, due to a big wave of migrants coming from outside the Valley over the last few decades. Nowadays the Newars number 1,245,000 people, which means 5,5 per cent of the total population of Nepal. (Toffin 2008:1) Their mother tongue is “Newari,” a Tibeto-Burmese language that has its roots in the Sino-Tibetan language family. Most of the Newari speakers, however, additionally speak fluent Nepali, an Indo-Germanic language that nowadays constitutes the official language of Nepal. Krishna Bahadur Gurung, a local businessman grew up in Lalitpur after his family moved from Gorkha to the valley, where he was born. His parents only spoke Nepali with him, but

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<sup>22</sup> JRASB, vol. IXX. 1923

<sup>23</sup> Journal of the Bihar Research Society Vol. XXXIV. 1948

<sup>24</sup> Nepali, Gopal Singh. 1965. *The Newars. An Ethno-Sociological Study of Himalayan Community*. Bombay.

<sup>25</sup> Slusser, Mary. 1982. *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. New Jersey.

<sup>26</sup> Gellner, David. 1992. *Monk, householder, and tantric priest. Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of ritual*. Cambridge.

<sup>27</sup> Toffin, Gérard. 2008. *Newar Society. City, Village and Periphery*. Kathmandu.

Newari became his second language, which he “picked up on the street” as he recounts<sup>28</sup>. Even though the number of Newari- speaking Nepalis is decreasing, the language is still being used in Lalitpur and has not been ousted by Nepali yet. Because of the high number of ethnic groups within Nepal, the Newars cannot be presented as a distinct and self-contained ethnic tribe. They absorbed many features i.e. from another major group of the country, the Nepali-speaking Parvatyās from western-Nepal, (*parbat*: “hill”). Many of their customs and traditions have been absorbed by the Newars already since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Another reason that the Newars cannot be viewed as a distinct tribe, though they do share a common language, is their complex system of caste hierarchy, which consists of 30 main caste groups that are arranged along lines structured upon criteria of pure and impure. This hierarchical system additionally incorporates a dual dimension consisting of castes that are Buddhist and practise Vajrayāna, a tantric form of Buddhism and others that are Hindu. These two religious strands have coexisted and interacted since ancient times, which resulted in a syncretistic religious practise that adds another load to the complexity of studying the Newars. This phenomenon will be explained more detailed in chapter 2.3 below.

Newar society, as can be seen today, was largely shaped in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Kathmandu Valley at that time was called Nepāh Valley and divided into three distinct kingdoms ruled by the Malla kings, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. The surrounding cultural centres, especially the classical Indian civilisation, have influenced the Newar caste and its social system in a decisive way. The Newar civilisation is strongly south Asian in character, because its culture mainly derived from the cultures of the Gangetic Plains and in some parts also from South India. The social structure, however, has been laid around the Nepali kingdoms and their local representatives in the villages and cities. Until today certain Newari surnames still indicate the former roles of the ancestor within the kingdom, such as Cipālu (“salt and ginger”), or Nyāchya (“fishhead”). These names probably date back to the time of Siddhi Narasimha, the ruler of the kingdom of Lalitpur from 1620 until 1661. There are, however, several other elements that distinguish the Newar culture from the one of their southern neighbours, because the Newars not only drew their cultural influences from the south, but also from the eastern and northern parts of their surroundings. The Kathmandu Valley civilisation is thus, as Gérard Toffin stresses in his introduction, the outcome of a Himalayan interface. (Toffin 2008:9)

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<sup>28</sup> Krishna Bahadur Gurung, personal conversation, 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

The fieldwork, however, revealed that, from an emic perspective, it is not possible to clearly speak of “The Newars” as a homogenous group. Locals only use the title “Newar” as a way of identifying themselves as non- Parbatyā and thus Newari-speaking. Newar identity means different things to different people. Caste affiliation represents a much stronger element of identity, than the mere fact to be a Newar. The farmer caste, for example practises a distinct “Maharjan tradition” within religious life and believe that they are the true descendants of the original population of the Kathmandu Valley and that all other castes developed out of them. Together with the caste-identity comes the place of residence, as will be discussed more detailed in chapter 2.4. Most of the Newars interview during the time of fieldwork within the Kumbheśvara temple compound where proud to be inhabitants of the “Kuntī area”. Speaking of a distinct “Newar identity” is thus problematic. The vast number of migrants that floats into the Kathmandu Valley from all parts of the country in the last ten years, however, triggered a recent trend of creating such an identity. Maybe because the awareness is growing among all different groups of Newar castes, that political or social decisions are now directed against them as “Newars”<sup>29</sup>.

## 2.2. Newar caste system (New. *jāti vyavasthā*)

The caste system of the Newars -though weakened in the course of social transformation, which were activated by modern ideas - still remains the basis for the disposition of each Newar individual, especially concerning his or her religious identity. In general it can be said, that the religious hierarchy among the Newar caste system, as David Gellner stresses, is bicephalic. (Gellner 1992:43ff.) On the one side are the Rājopādhyāya Brahmans, who embody Hinduism and on the other side are the Vajrācārya-Sākya castes that embody Buddhism. The cast-group into which a Newar is born, determines his or her religious affiliation, which is again connected with the identity of the family priest (*purohit*). Normally, if the latter is a Rājopādhyāya priest, the family is *sīvamārgī* and thus follows “the path of Śiva”. If the family priest is Vajrācārya, the family is *buddhamārgī* and thus “follows the path of Budhha”. Especially among the caste of the Śreṣṭhas, as will be explained later, exceptions occur quite often. It is not possible to have more than one family priest, but it is possible to be a married Newar with a *purohit* belonging to the Vajrācārya

<sup>29</sup> Further information: Gellner, David. 2008. Caste, Communalism, and Communism: Newars and the Nepalese state. In: *Nationalism and Ethnicity in Nepal*. Ed.: Gellner, David, Pfaff- Czarnecka, Joanna, Whelpton, John. Kathmandu: 151-184.

caste and having a wife whose family priest is a Rājopādhyāya Brahman. It has to be mentioned, however, that the largest group of the Newars does not consider themselves as either pure Hindu or pure Buddhist. Many people from the middle and lower classes prefer to apply none of these two concepts in an exclusive form on themselves and their traditions, because religion is understood as a part of social life. It corresponds with the seasonal cycle and with the life of the individual and their family and clan. Only when it comes to a soteriological question, one of the two concepts has to be chosen. Therefore the terms *śivamārgī* and *buddhamārgī* can only be applied within the soteriological field, but does not determine the social practice of religion. (Gellner 1992:6)

The main casts of Lalitpur are Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, who primarily represent Buddhism. They both stand on the same hierarchical level even though the former has the additional legitimization to act as a priest. Full-time priests are, however, a minority in Lalitpur; most of the Vajrācāryas, as well as the Śākyas, work as craftsmen, carpenter, copper-, or silver-smiths and dominate the lucrative “curio”-trade with tourists. The Śreṣṭhas are the most educated cast and oriented strongly towards the western culture. Within their caste, there are again subgroups divided into the higher ones, the *chatarīya*, or “six *thar*” (sub-caste) and the lower ones, the *pānctharīya*, or “five *thar*”. Referring to cast status, the farmer castes of Lalitpur, called Maharjan and Dagol, remain underneath the Śreṣṭhas. Many of the former still work as farmers and fulfil a wide range of traditional socio-religious tasks for the higher casts, such as cremation, the carrying of loads during ceremonies and the function of a midwife during childbirth. The lowest castes, which still belong into the category of being “pure,” are the Karamjit (New. Bhāh), the Citrakār (New. Pu), Nakarmī (New. Kau), Mālī (New. Gathu), Rankitkār (New. Cipā), Rajaka (New. Dhobi, Dhubyā), Carmakār (New. Kulu) and Cyāmkhalah (New. Cyāme). The last three of them belong to the group from whom water cannot be accepted. Into this group the Khaḍgīs can be added, the caste group of the butchers, traditionally located around the Kuntī area. Finally on the lowest-end of hierarchy are the Dyahlā and the Cyāmkhala. The Kāpālī and the Dyahkā also belong here, but still sometimes occupy the position of priests in some major temples in Lalitpur. The Kāpālīs are responsible for the Bhīmsen temple and some shrines of mother goddesses within the former city walls and the Dyahkā for some shrines of mother goddesses outside the former city walls. (Gellner 1992:52)

The cast group, which feels the strongest tension between Hindu and Buddhist identity are the Śreṣṭhas. Even though they cannot perform priestly functions and many of them feel

a strong Buddhist identity -especially the ones who have a Vajracārya family priest- they are generally identified as the embodiment of Hinduism. This is, because Hinduism (*śivadharma*) has until recently been the religion of the rulers (*rājnaitik dharma*) and the Śreṣṭhas claim to belong to be Kṣatryas, the group that once administered the Malla kingdoms and who were the ruling elite. (Gellner 1992:55) The co-existence of the two religious concepts has thus been based on an ancient relation of power with the Hindus on top and the Buddhists underneath.

### 2.3. *Śivamārgī* and *Buddhamārgī*. Rivalry, co-existence and incorporation

Under the reign of the Licchavi kings (5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century), Hindu and Buddhist cults were both supported, but a hierarchy has been established among the different gods and goddesses. In a Hadigaon inscription by Amśuvarman from 608 AD, the former Licchavi king ordered the highest spiritual ranking be given to two Hindu temples of the time: the Paśupatinātha temple and Cāngu Nārāyana, subsequently followed by five Buddhist monasteries. These monasteries were all situated within the present area of Lalitpur and therefore indicate that the reputation of this city as an important town for Buddhism already existed since ancient times. The presence of five Buddhist monasteries in the top ranking, however, also demonstrates, that even though until Amśuvarman, the preferred court cult was Vaiṣṇavism and thereafter Śaivism, Buddhism has always enjoyed an important status among them. (Gellner 1996:132) While it is not known for the time of the Licchavi period (300- ca. 879 AD), it is clear, that during the reign of the Malla kings, more inhabitants of Lalitpur were orientated towards Buddhism than towards Hinduism. The rulers themselves, however, legitimated their power in Hindu terms and claimed to be partial incarnations of Viṣṇu and the descendants of Rāma. In order to maintain power in a city largely populated by Buddhists, the kings continuously tried to push Buddhist rites and rituals into a larger Hindu frame where Hindu priests were considered higher in rank than Buddhist Vajrācārya and Sākyā priests. “In this Hindu framework, Brahmins had ultimate spiritual authority, and Buddhist priests were considered lower, more specialised ritual technicians. There is some evidence that Buddhism was considered a suitable religion for people of low status, though Buddhists themselves usually reject such an association.” (Gellner 1996:137) There has been a tendency to Hinduize the rituals and practises of the Buddhist folk, or, in other words, to subordinate the Buddhist religion into the Hindu pantheon. An evident example is

the general Hindu concept of subordinating the Buddha, by making him an Avatāra of Viṣṇu, which is depicted on the outside façade of the Kṛṣṇa temple. A more particular example, which only occurs in Nepal, is the famous golden window above the main door of the former palace on Patan’s Durbar Square. Quite unusually, it depicts the Buddhist Bodhisattva Śrṣṭikartṛ-lokeśvara (“Lokeśvara emitting all the gods”) in the centre, a form of Karuṇāmaya surrounded by Viṣṇus Avatāras and his mount Garuḍa below. The example of the golden window represents an amalgamation of iconographic and conceptual ideas of *buddhamārgī* and *śivamārgī*. From a Buddhist point of view, the image depicts the superiority of Buddhism over Hinduism, but it could also be interpreted the other way around: Since the Bodhisattva is surrounded by Viṣṇus *avatāras* and Garuḍa above, it may also indicate that he is only a sub-form of the superior god Viṣṇu. “When the king appeared at the window he would, of course, be framed as Viṣṇu also. Thus the most popular divinity of the city (Karuṇāmaya, Bugadyah) and the king himself are both forms of the same high Hindu god, Viṣṇu.” (Gellner 1996:141) The example of the golden window shows that the kings of the Malla dynasty saw themselves as followers of Vaiṣṇavism and thus declared Hinduism as the ruling religious tradition. At the same time however, the rulers were reverent followers of the main Buddhist cults and traditions, which can be seen by the classic example of Lalitpur’s national deity Matsyendranātha/Karuṇāmaya. This god used to be exclusively connected with Buddhist belief and rituals until king Siddhi Narasiṁha Malla introduced the new custom of having two Brahmins sitting in the chariot of Matsyendranātha/Karuṇāmaya during the famous annual festival dedicated to that god. The Malla kings were also responsible for the identification of Matsyendranātha/ Karuṇāmaya with the Hindu gods Śiva and Kṛṣṇa.

After having prepared the grounds, the Hindu population attending the festival grew, until it became equally important for both Hindus and Buddhists. Today, the deity is most commonly known as Matsyendranātha and connected with a mythical *yogin* claimed by both Śaivaite and Buddhist tantric tradition. Before the statue has been renamed as a Buddhist and then additionally as a Brahmanical deity, the cult was dedicated to an indigenous god known as Bungadyo. (Slusser 1982:368) The threefold transformation of the object, from Bungadyo, over Karuṇāmaya and finally Matsyendranātha, shows a common metamorphosis of the Valleys’ indigenous gods and goddesses into more respectable deities of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. A similar processes of metamorphosis will be drafted, which happened with the god-images within the Kumbheśvara temple compound in the later

chapters.

#### 2.4. Social Transformation and preservation of the Newar caste system

The cast system has been known and practised in the Kathmandu Valley already since the Licchavi Period (300-879 AD) and was a copy of the Indian system. According to popular belief and local chronicles (*vamśāvalī*) it was king Jayastithi Malla (1382-1395) who set out new rules for it in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Together with five Brahmins from India, so it is said, he ordered the society into four *varnas* and 64 castes, based on hereditary occupations and genealogy. (Nepali 1965:146) Whether this origin is true or not remains uncertain. What may come closest to reality is to define the complex system of sub castes as the product of centuries of gradual accretion, as Mary Slusser suggests. (Slusser 1982:59) Furthermore, concrete changes have been executed concerning the law and some of the caste groups that are enlisted in the laws of king Sthiti Malla do not exist anymore, while new ones emerged at their place, such as the Tuladhara that are now joined in a large caste known as Uray.

More changes happened under the Parbatyās from western Nepal, who conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1769 under king Prithvi Narayan Shah and unified Nepal with Kathmandu as its capital city. And even though Newar traditions and ceremonies have persisted the invasion up to the present and have not been erased by the new rulers, the conquest of the Valley and the acquisition of the throne by the Shah dynasty have caused a trauma among the Newar citizens, which lasts until today. In the course of time, the new rulers brought a lot of changes to the Valley. They introduced the first legal code, the “Muluki Ain” in 1854, which imposed several new laws directed at specific castes. In addition, they divided the Nepalese inhabitants broadly into five different categories: First the high-caste Hindus, who wear the sacred thread (*tāgādhāri jāt*), second the non-enslavable alcohol-drinking castes (*namasinya matwāli jāt*), third the enslavable alcohol-drinking castes (*masinya matwāli jāt*), fourth, touchable castes from whom water cannot be accepted (*pāni na chalne chhoi chiṭo hālnu na parne*) and fifth, untouchable castes, from whom water can also not be accepted (*pāni na chalne chhoi chiṭo hālnu parne*). The Newars became reduced to a distinct ethnic group, subsumed under the social category of the liquor drinking ethnic groups, which was considered a lower class. (Sharma 1983:17)

Much later, in 1963, the legislation was modified again making all citizens theoretically equal before the law. Certain traditional Hindu social concepts have been abolished,

discrimination on the basis of caste and polygamy has been forbidden. Furthermore intercaste marriages were legalised and woman's rights were negotiated and determined by law for the first time. The significance of caste has thus been dramatically diminished. Four months later, however, the Special Complaints Department of the Palace Secretariat abandoned their actions and announced, that the new law did not abolish the caste system, but only introduced equality before the law. "Those who indulge in actions prejudicial to the social customs and traditions of others will be punished." (Joshi, Rose 1966:474) But still, since the 1960s, legal references were no longer made to the caste system in the civil code and discrimination based on caste differences became illegal. These transformations also affected the religious life of the Newars. Their surrounding got increasingly secularised and egalitarian, modern ideas were pushing strong into the live worlds of all inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. In the 1970s the country was opened to outside influences and introduced foreign commodities. The new economic possibilities and a modern school system have practically erased illiteracy among most of the castes. Together with the access to western medicine this caused an explosion of population and more than doubled the number of inhabitants in the Kathmandu Valley. Especially the high caste-group of the Śrēśthas turned strongly towards the new developments and spoke increasingly English and Nepali instead of Newari. New religious trends evolved, such as the egalitarian Theravāda Buddhism.

Even though the collective festivals were still celebrated with enthusiasm, the old Newar rituals and ceremonies became more and more disconnected from social life. Religion has not yet become a completely private affair, but it legitimates less and less the prevailing hierarchies. During the time of research, however, it could still be seen that the old social structures have not died out completely. Caste distinctions may have been weakened, but one can still experience them regularly in daily life. A local inhabitant of Lalitpur from a Kadgī family, for example, once recounted proudly that his brother married a woman from a Gurung family, who was then warmly integrated into the Newar family. Only the fact that he put so much emphasis on the modernity of this union shows that the traditional caste distinctions have not been erased from the collective mind of the present Newar society. Especially during ritual ceremonies they remain relevant. Cultural and spatial symbols that reflect the old model of society are still operating during festivals. The speed of social transformations caused by political and economic changes therefore should not be overestimated.

The political turmoil has opened the Nepalese conscience to egalitarian ideas, but the system of caste and hierarchies is still operating in many fields. When looking at the geographic order of the settlements, for example, it can be seen, that there still exists a feeling for spatial affiliation among the different caste groups. The higher the cast group, the closer it lives to the centre. There are four groups from the lowest Newar castes, which are divided into the “untouchables” called *pore* (sweepers, basket makers and fishermen) and the “unpurified” called *kasāi* (butcher) who settle in the four cardinal directions in front of the old boarders of the inner city. In the south and east they have their quarters directly in front of the old city gates. In the north they settle beyond the Kuntī area on the older north-south axis (Map 2). The only group that does not settle on the final parts of an axis are the *pore* groups in the east. Instead their location marks the place where the deceased from the district Gābāhā are being carried to the cremation grounds. (Gutschow 1982:159) In the Kuntī area, for example, where the Kumbheśvara temple compound is situated and the fieldwork was conducted, a big number of Newars belonging to the Kadgī caste, the traditional caste of butchers, are settled in accordance with the old spatial order. The Norwegian anthropologist Benedict Lie collected the number of Kadgī settlements for his study in 1999 and counted 92 households in the Kumbheśvara area, which is the highest number of Kadgī households in Lalitpur. Since the demand for meat in the Kathmandu Valley has grown considerably in the last years, however, the butchers have gained a valuable source of income and became relatively wealthy. (Lie 1999: 5) The economic changes may have led to the fact, that many people belonging to the Kadgī caste do not practise their traditional labour as butchers anymore due to their newly gained financial independence. The old system of the caste status determining the economic status and profession is thus outdated, the traditional settlement of the Kadgīs around the Kumbheśvara area, however, still remains intact.

### 3. ENTERING THE FIELD. THE HISTORICAL SITE OF THE KUMBHEŚVARA TEMPLE COMPOUND

The Kumbheśvara temple compound is situated in the north of the north-south axis of Lalitpur city (Map 2), at the other end is the Matsyendranātha temple that equals the central temple of the compound in height. Both of them are the tallest sacred buildings of the city. In the middle of the two resides the old palace on Durbar Square.

The chapter will be opened with a short historical overview of the area and with an important legend, which is connected with the foundation of Lalitpur. Subsequently the present situation of the compound will be demonstrated, by giving an insight into the administration of the complex. After a detailed description of the temple compound and its objects as they can be found today a listing of every temple, shrine and statue within the compound as well as a short description and a photograph of each relevant object will be provided. Finally the biographies of the material gods and goddesses and their meaning for the visitors of the Kumbheśvara temple compound will be traced and examined more closely.

#### 3.1. Legend of Lalit

The history of the Kumbheśvara temple surrounds a legendary farmer called Lalit. His legend is known to the majority of Patans' inhabitants and indicates that the city emerged out of the site around the Kumbheśvara temple. According to the legend drafted by Daniel Wright (2007:134 ff.), a huge forest called Lalitban covered the area where the temple of Kumbheśvara is nowadays situated and continues that under the reign of king Birdeva<sup>30</sup>, a grass cutter who suffered from severe leprosy went regularly to this place, in order to collect some grass and sell it in the former capital city Madhalakhu. One day the grass cutter was looking for water in the forest and dug several holes into the earth with his *nōl*, a bamboo stick used to carry loads. Soon he found a tank full of water drank from it and took a bath. His skin decay miraculously disappeared and he became a handsome man, cured from his disease. When the grass cutter arrived in the city to sell his load, he passed the *rājā*

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<sup>30</sup>According to David Gellner (1996:126) he is seen as the father of King Narendra Deva, who brought Matsyendranātha/Karuṇamāya from Assam to Nepal. Daniel Wright, however, claims that Narendra Deva was Bir Devas grandson. (1972:139)

(king) who noticed the change and wanted to know what happened. After hearing his story, the king made him his friend/minister and gave him the name “Lalit”. In the same night the Rājā had a dream in which a voice was telling him: „O Rājā! The name of that tank is Gaurī-kund-tīrtha. At the distance of eight *hāths* (cubits) from the southeast corner, I, Sarbēswara-ling, am buried. Dig and see. The *nōl* of the clown has become *siddha* (supernatural) and is my Kāmēswara. Found a city near it, and call it Lalit-pattan.“ (Wright 2007:135) On the next day the king sent Lalit over the Bagmati River and told him to establish a city with the name of Lalitpur. In the middle of the city the former grass cutter built a tank in order to worship the *nāgas* (serpents) in it as well as many other deities. Over the tank he built a *caitya* (Buddhist cenotaph) and a fountain (*dhārā*), erected a *śivalīnga*, the gods Ganeśa and Mahākāla, an open hall (*mandapa*) and then constructed a palace (*durbār*) for the king and finally consecrated everything he built. Since he was a devotee of Mani Jōginī, he called each place after his chosen goddess: Mani-*talāva*, Mani-*mandapa*, Mani-*caitya*, Mani-*dhārā*, Mani-linga, Mani-Ganeśa, Mani Kumāra, Mani-Mahākāla and Mani-*gal-bhatta*. In the end he built a *dharma-sālā* which now stands near the Kumbheśvara temple, for entertaining 33 crore (ten million) of gods. For all his good deeds, Lalit finally obtained salvation.

In David Gellner’s translation of a slightly different version of the myth (1996:127), Sarveśvara appears in the dream of the king and says: “Oh King! To make the city cut down Lalita wood. [Design it] in accordance with the 24 elements (*tattva*) and in the shape of a *śri yantra* (for example a *mandala*), and make your minister Lalita the architect (*arkhatayārī*). Establish our self-existent Śivalīngas within the city. You too will be saved (*uddhār*).“ Further this Version recounts, that the king established eight goddesses around the city: Bāl Kumārī in the east, Thache Mahālakṣmī in the south, Kasuti Kumār in the southeast, Yappā Vaiṣṇavī in the west, Nyekhukwa Rudrāyanī in the west, Lohagal Indrāyanī in the northwest, Dhātila Vārahī in the north and Sikabahī Cāmuṇḍā in the north.” These may represent the eight mother goddesses, though the uncoordinated instructions of the cardinal directions are irritating.

A local from the Kuntī area insisted, that the story is not a legend but a fact, since, as he claims, Lalit’s descendants, a Jyāpu family, still lives in this area (close to Kumbheśvara). Up to the present day however, the legendary carrying stick of Lalit can be seen at a place called Jhyatāpol to the south of Kumbheśvara. There is a small painting on a stone pillar that is said to depict the face of grass cutter (Fig. 1). The spring with the water that miraculously

healed the grass cutter from his disease (Fig. 24.1) is situated beside the main temple within the compound and is now covered by a small temple with a white dome, which stands in between the tank and the main temple (Fig. 24). According to Gellner (1996:128), some say that the carrying stick of Lalit is situated within this temple, but during the time of fieldwork in 2010, nothing was discovered that might have represented it. The spring appears in a round stone „pot“ or *khumba* in Sanskrit and is said, to be connected with the inner water reservoir situated within the compound.

The water from the spring is believed to come directly from the sacred lake Gosaikund, situated in the middle hills of the Himalayas within the Rasuwa district. The Newari name for the lake is *Śilu*, which is an epithet of Śiva, or *Śilu tīrtha*, the “sacred place of Śiva”. Several stories are circulating around Lalitpur, which establish a connection between those two places. Daniel Wright reports, that king Shrinivas Malla raised the temple to five stories and repaired the interior pond (*kunda*). In this pond a local is said to have once lost his duck and then found it again on his pilgrimages to the lake of Gosainkund. (2007:245) Another story is about a devotee of Śiva who dropped his pot in the Gosaikund lake and then found it again after it emerged in the well of the Kumbheśvara temple.<sup>31</sup> From that time on it became widely believed that the interior pond in the Kumbheśvara temple compound is filled with holy water coming directly from the sacred lake of Gosaikund. For the devotees who cannot make a pilgrimage to the lake it is therefore possible to take a bath at the Kumbheśvara compound instead. (Gellner 1994:161)

Whether the legend can be based on true historical facts or not, the story indicates that the site of the Kumbheśvara temple has a long history, which is additionally apparent by many remaining objects and statues, that are likely to date back until the Licchavi period as will be shown in a later chapter. Daniel Wright’s account of the myth surrounding the farmer Lalit also calls attention to the worship of *nāgas* during a certain time period, which seems to have been a central cult in Lalitpur. (“In the middle of the city the former grass cutter built a tank in order to worship the *nāgas* (snakes) and many other deities in it.“) As will become apparent in the upcoming chapters of this work, it is very likely that this serpent cult may be the predecessor of an annual procession happening at the sacred pond within the Kumbheśvara temple.

The situation of most of Lalitpur’s holy places is very complex, due to the plurality of meanings attached to them by different groups of people that have to be considered when

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<sup>31</sup> Krishna Bahadur Gurung, personal conversation, 12th of August 2010, Lalitpur.

looking at it. Additionally these meanings change due to certain socio-political processes throughout the time and thus, form a complex body of signs and signification. In the upcoming chapters of this work it will furthermore be demonstrated that the gods and goddesses of the Kumbheśvara temple compound passed through some similar transformation processes in the course of time. Some objects still carry their indigenous denominations under their Brahmanical camouflage, others, once overwhelmed with glory and veneration, remain abandoned and forgotten in a dusty corner within the temple compound.

### **3.2. Lalitpur and the historical origin of the Kumbheśvara temple**

The legend given in chapter 3.1 claims that king Birdeva, who must have lived around 650 AD in a city called Madhyalakhu, has founded the city. According to Gutschow Lalitpur is the oldest of the three main cities of the Kathmandu Valley and its origin is likely to date back until the 6<sup>th</sup> century. (Gutschow 1982:17)

From the early Malla-period until 1480, only little information on Lalitpur has been passed on. Solely the destruction of the city through Muslim conquerors can be dated precisely through an inscription inside the Pimbāhā, which recounts their short but destructive invasion in the year 1346 AD. Until 1618, the biggest part of Lalitpur belonged to the kingdom of Kathmandu. It was king Siddhi Narasimha, who later turned Lalitpur into an independent kingdom and led the city into its period of prosperity. For the present city the period of Malla rule (1382-1768) was of great importance and highly responsible for the cities visual appearance as we know it today. In 1382 Jayasthiti Malla became king and ruled the area for 13 years until 1395. He and his later successor Yaksha Malla, who was his grandson and ruled from 1428 to 1482, managed to unify Nepal and led the country through a time of unusual peace. It was also in this time, as Daniel Wright recounts, that a two-storied temple dedicated to Kumbheśvara was built in Lalitpur in 1392, which means still under the rule of king Jayasthiti Malla. On a stone pillar beside the Unmatta Bhairava temple within the present temple compound is written, that after draining the water of the tank, which is situated in the temple compound, Jayasthiti Malla found eight stone images of Nārayana, Gaṇeśa, Śītalā, Vāsuki Gaurī, Sānda, Kṛtimukha and the Āgamadevatās of Baudhamārgīs and established them in various places within the temple compound. Afterwards he erected a statue of Unmata Bhairava in order to pacify Śītalā, the goddess of

small pox. This stone inscription bears the date Nepal Samvat (NS) 542 (1422 AD) and thus falls under the reign of king Jyotir Malla. (Wright 1877:183) D.R. Regmi quotes an inscription that he found on a list of the scholar of Himalayan History, Luciano Petech, which commemorates the completion of the new Kumbheśvara temple in NS 512 Vaiśākha kṛṣṇa 6 (1392 AD) by a certain Ananta Lakshmi, who is the daughter-in-law of a man called Jayabhima. (Regmi 1966:357) David Gellner claims, that it was Jayabhima himself who constructed the temple as he hoped that this act would cure his wife who, after a high fever, had lost her conscience. (Gellner 1994:162) There may have been an earlier temple on the same place before the present temple was constructed however, since the site houses many stone objects that date back until the time of the early Licchavi dynasty (300-879) as will be shown more detailed in a later chapter. The former temple was however destroyed during the events of 1349, when the Muslim leader Shams ud-din Ilyas Shah of Bengal raided the Kathmandu Valley and systematically destroyed a large number of temples and objects of worship. (Petech 1958:119-120) After Yaksha Malla (1428-1482), the kingdom was divided between his sons and with this the early period of the Mallas ended. From 1516 until 1597, Lalitpur was under the rule of several important noblemen from the area, notably under Vishnu Simha (1546-56) and his son, Purandara Simha (1560-97) and thus, independent from the Mallas. The latter's son, Shiva Simha, king of Kathmandu, invaded Lalitpur and ruled both cities until his death in 1619. Subsequently his kingdom was divided again, Lalitpur was given to his grandson Siddhi Narasimha and Kathmandu to Lakshmi Narasimha. (Gellner 1996:136) The famous Durbar Square of Lalitpur and many other popular monuments in the city all go back to the reign of Siddhi Narasimha (1619-1660) as well as to his two successors, his son Shrinivas (1660-1684) and his grandson Yog Narendra (1684-1705), whose artistic motivation was driven by the next door concurrence in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. During their reign, however, in 1663, a fire devastated large parts of Lalitpur, maybe also the Kumbheśvara temple, because in 1672 king Shrinivas Malla is said to have rebuilt the area and erected a two storied temple with a four-faced śivalinga (*caturmukhalinga*) there. (Regmi 1966: 285) During his reign, the Sarveśvara linga was regarded as Paśupatinātha, the manifestation of Śiva as Lord of the Animals. Under the reign of king Yog Narendra Malla, the temple was enlarged to five storeys (Hasrat 1979:70), in order to rebalance the height with the Matsyendranātha temple that stands on a higher altitude. “It is said that, looked at from a distance atop a house in the heart of Patan city, this temple appears to rise as high as the top of the Matsyendranātha

temple, which is situated at a higher altitude.” (Regmi 1966:600) David Gellner, however, quotes a local chronicle that imputes the enlargement to king Shrinivas, whose reign endured from 1658 until 1684/86, but due to other historical sources, the author himself stresses, that king Shrinivas probably only gilded the roofs in 1672 and that the enlargement was really conducted by king Yog Narendra Malla. (Gellner 1994:162) Until today the Kumbheśvara temple is one of the two remaining five-storied temples in Nepal, the other one being Nyātapola in Bhaktapur, which was constructed in 1708. (Bernier 1978:88)

In 1768 the Kathmandu Valley was taken over by the Gorkhalis (Parbatyās) under Prithvi Narayan Shah, who unified the whole area that now constitutes modern Nepal. Lalitpur itself was from then on “(...) ruled by a series of weak and short-lived monarchs. Real power reverted to the descendants of the noblemen who had dominated the city in the sixteenth century.” (Gellner 1996:136) In 1833 another earthquake hit the city and destroyed a big part of the former temple situated within the Kumbheśvara temple compound. The present temple in the centre of the compound therefore probably derives from this time period, but additionally incorporates several older elements that survived the major historical tumults. (Wiesner 1978:17) In 1934 the momentary last earthquake damaged the temple and was later renovated through king Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah (reign: 1955-1972), as an inscription on the pillar on the left hand side of the Bagalāmukhī temple shows. (Shah 1960:170-171) Under the Early Shah (1760-1846) and especially under the Rana (1846-1951) dynasties, the process of Sanskritization with its political pressure was further strengthened, which can be demonstrated by the increasing orientation of middle class Śreṣṭha families -that once followed Buddhist rituals- towards Hindu customs and practises. After the downfall of the Monarchy and the introduction of “democracy” since 1951, social change additionally led to a decreasing interest in religious involvement and the slow, but steady decay of Buddhist material heritage.

The area of the Kumbheśvara temple compound has been the setting of major historical turmoil. The objects it harbours today date back until the time of the Licchavi kings and queens and are thus loaded with history. Even though there is nearly no written knowledge about the development of the city, the god-images themselves and the interaction of the people with them can reveal many secrets.

### 3.3. Administration of the temple compound

The administration, social and financial organisation of the temple compound is fundamentally based on a socio-religious institution called *guthī* whose name derived from the Sanskrit word “*gosthī*” which means “association” or “assembly”. The concept of *gosthī* has been adopted from ancient India already since the Licchavi times, and once put into its new context, has been reshaped and transformed, in order to fit into the local context, e.g. the Newar society with its emphasis on territorial bonds and the strength of mono-caste organisations that are not wholly connected with kinship. Later, the *guthī* became typical for the Malla Kingdom and continued to function as the characteristic factor for integration into the Newar society, until the decade of modern Nepal. The *guthīs* functioned traditionally through land endowments that were given by the kings or affluent people. Through the income of the lands produces, the cult for certain deities, as well as the construction of their temples, shrines and ceremonies, could be afforded and maintained. When examining the *guthī*-system more closely, it becomes apparent, that the Newar *guthī* is a highly complex network comprising many variations that depend on caste or locality. Nevertheless, Toffin distinguished between three main types of *guthīs*: The first one is set up to worship a particular deity or the celebration of a festival, the second type is surrounding all kinds of funeral associations that focus on funeral rites and regulations when one of the community members dies. Finally the third type constitutes territorial segments or ward groups, mainly linked with music, but also with workshops. Most of them are private associations and only a few are recognized by the government which controls them by the so called *guthī samsthān*, “an autonomous body that regulates all lands held under royal *guthī* tenure (*rāj guthī*) for taxation purposes and oversees the utilisation of the produce of these endowments.” (Toffin 2008:292)

The cults surrounding the gods and goddesses were used by the royals to express their sovereignty in religious terms, which is especially apparent in the cult of the tutelary deities as it used to be popular during the Malla period. The cult of these tutelary deities worked on a multi-caste basis, where each caste was allocated a certain role, which automatically reflected their social status. But whether the *guthī* is dedicated to a tutelary goddess of the kings or to any other deity, the network of these *guthī* institutions binds the Newars together and serves as an identifying factor on the basis of caste, patrilineal grouping and territory. “Further, while the manifest function of such *guthīs* is the fulfilment of some secular or

religious interests, they have the latent function of preserving the norms and values of the community.” (Nepali 1965:191)

In modern Nepal, however, the system of land endowments and the *guthī*-system in general is quickly vanishing. Even though they are still strongly visible in the day-to-day life of Newar villages, many of the religious associations already collapsed, because the lands started to be used for a different purpose. (Slusser 1982:12) Individuals or households that are part of a *guthī* do not have to face strict sanctions anymore when defaulting, while in the past this resembled a complete social boycott and led to an exclusion of the malefactor from the community. Since partly the all-encompassing system of the *guthī* may have been primarily responsible for the maintenance and unbroken continuity of many cults and ritual practises, a disappearance of the *guthīs* in the Kathmandu Valley could imply a parallel erasure of these practises over the course of time. Also the Kumbheśvara temple complex is run by several *guthīs* and group formations, whose members are responsible for the maintenance of its objects and the organisation and administration of religious rituals and festivities.

As was already mentioned above, the main priest of the temple is called Madhav Shyam Sharma, a Rājopādhyāya Brahman from the Newar community. He is the eldest of five brothers among whom three additionally hold duties and responsibilities within the temple. Madhav Shyam Sharma is the only one allowed to touch the *sanctum* of the main temple and is responsible for the daily puja for both Kumbheśvara and Bagalāmukhī. As long as he remains close to the linga, he cannot touch any of the devotees, since they might be impure. Beside him and his brothers, there are the so-called god-guardians or *deopālas* who come from Bhaṇḍārī families, a sub-caste of the Kṣatriyas that originated in ancient India. They are also allowed to remain inside the temple. Touching the *sanctum* is strictly forbidden to the *deopālas*, but to hand over the sanctified “gift” of the god (*prasāda*) to the devotees is one of their duties. Most of the time, however, they prepare plates, on which the devotees can find sandalwood-paste (*candana*) and rice mixed with vermillion powder for a self-made *ṭikā*, a little jug with *jala* and flowers as *prasāda*. Every six months they rotate and another Bhaṇḍārī family that lives in the Kumbheśvara area takes over to assist the priests with their work. The Bhaṇḍārīs are Newars and belong to the Newar caste called Lākhe. Since this is a Newari name and these surnames are in general less respected than Sanskritic ones, many families refer to the broader category of Śreṣṭha.

Another group of people that is allowed to remain within the temple are the Brahmins,

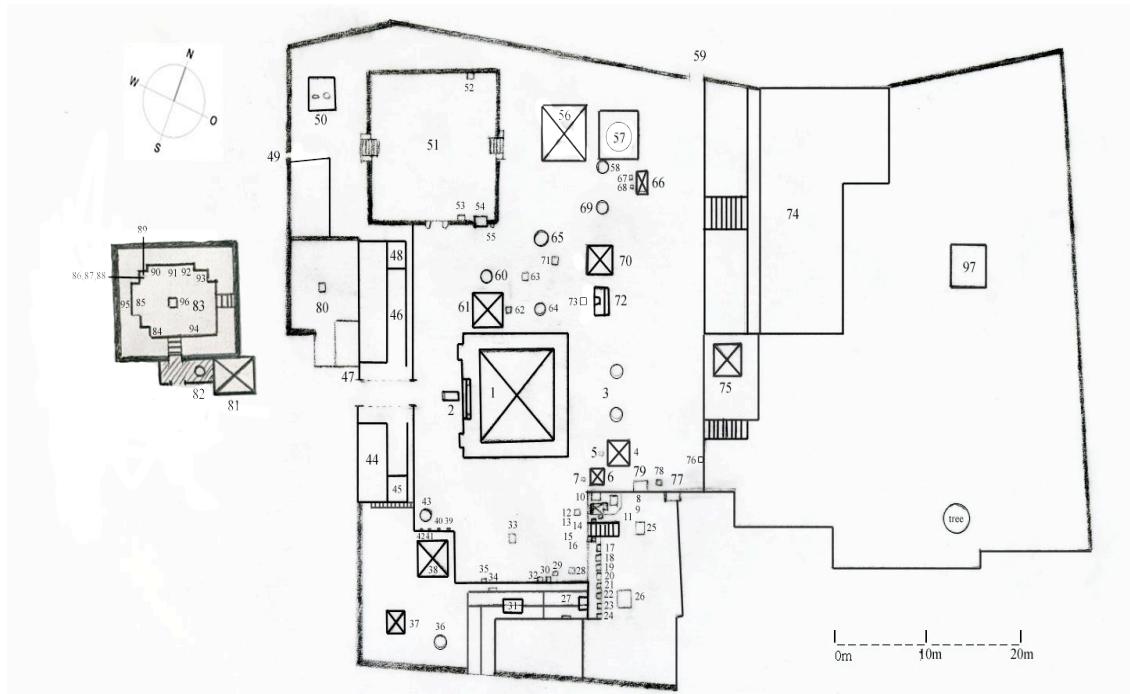
who perform the so-called *rudrī pāṭha*, a religious reading of *mantras*, referring to the *ṛgvedic* god Rudra. Everyone who is allowed to remain within the inner *ambulatory* (Fig. 4.1) has to follow strict rules of purity: leather goods and the consumption of impure foods such as garlic are forbidden. Foreigners are not allowed to step inside, since it is not possible to trace back their status of purity. If a foreigner would step into the inner *ambulatory* it could have consequences for the main priest. He and other temple workers therefore have to follow strict rules, not only to please the deity they are taking care of, but also to please certain state officials, who are responsible for the financial aspects of the compound. The compound is partly maintained with money from the state, which goes into the so-called *tol sudhātā samiti*, the Neighbourhood Development committee (literally: The Neighbourhood committee responsible for purity). The chairman of the committee is a practising astrologer and performer of tantric healing procedures called Aroj Kumar Khaḍgī. Additionally there are two *guthīs* responsible for the temple complex: the *bhajana mandala guthī* of Bagalāmukhī, whose chairman is also a Buddhist Newar called Suresh Khaḍgī and who executes his task since one year. What is also important to mention here is the *guthī samsthāna*, a state organisation, which is responsible for funding concerning the Kumbheśvara temple compound, such as conservation or renovation projects. The members of the *bhajana mandala guthī* are all men from Newar castes that live in the surrounding area. Every evening male members of the Newar castes meet on the ground floor of the house beside the main entry (Fig. 2) in order to conduct a religious singing to praise the tantric goddess Bagalāmukhī and her consort Kumbheśvara (Fig. 3). Throughout the area there are many groups like them, dedicated to several god and goddesses, but, as Nutan Sharma explains me, they too will soon vanish, since the younger generation is not interested in participating anymore. The local historian adds, that the participation in *bhajana* groups used to be extremely popular in the past, because they were the only possibility for common Newars to study during the repressive Rāna regime (1846- 1953) that forbade its subjects to visit schools. Nowadays, the *bhajana* teachers have to go from house to house to ask whether they have children who would be interested in learning how to play music, because nobody brings them anymore.<sup>32</sup> Since everyone has access to a certain level of state education, the *bhajana* groups as a method of social integration seem to be outdated and are thus endangered. Due to Bagalāmukhī's recent popularity however, the *bhajana guthī* dedicated to her is quite famous in Lalitpur. Also the annual festival of

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<sup>32</sup> Nutan Sharma, personal conversation, 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

Janaipūrṇimā attracts each year a big number of devotees.

### 3.4. Map of the Kumbheśvara temple compound and complete listing of its objects



Map 3. Kumbheśvara temple compound<sup>33</sup>

Legend:

1	Kumbheśvara temple	12	Plate with inscription
2	Nandin	13	Unknown stone relief
3	Śivalīngas	14	Unknown stone relief (Sumer?)
4	Gaṇeśa temple	15	Navagraha
5	Nandin	16	Bhairava (guard?)
6	Śivatempel w/caturmukhalinga	17	Plate with inscription
7	Nandin	18	Double shrine with two stone
8	Face of Bhairava	19	Śiva and Pārvatī with Nandin
9	Donor-/Buddha-figure (?)	20	Shrine with unknown deity (locally worshipped as Śītalā)
10	Plate with inscription	21	Viṣṇu on Garuḍa
11	Sarasvatī shrine reliefs (Devī/Tārā? Viṣṇu/Devī?) and broken śivalīnga	22	Nāgadeva (Vāsuki?)
		23	Broken pillar and headless donor
		24	Two pieces of relief
		25	Śivalīnga and Triśūla

<sup>33</sup> Drawn by the author, benchmark adopted from Paudyāl 2060 (AD 2004).

26	Śiva and Pārvatī (stone relief) and Triśūla	63	Large triśūla
27	Bhairava temple	64	Śivaliṅga
28	Tiled socle with stone relief	65	Viṣṇu riding on Garuḍa ( <i>garuḍāsana</i> Viṣṇu)
29	Plate with inscription	66	Shrine of female deity (Durgā?)
30	Plate with English inscription	67	Ground inscription
31	Bagalāmukhī temple	68	Ground inscription
32	Column with inscription	69	Śivaliṅga
33	Lion column	70	Nārayaṇa temple with five reliefs
34	Bell stand	71	Garuḍa
35	Small shrine with unknown deity	72	Viṣṇu shrine
36	Śivaliṅga	73	Ground inscription
37	Kedarnarayaṇa temple	74	Guṭhī house
38	Badrinarayaṇa temple	75	Hārītī/Śītalā temple
39	Plate with inscription	76	Shrine with unknown deity
40	Plate with inscription	77	Lalitādevī shrine
41	Plate with inscription	78	Bell stand
42	Plate with inscription	79	Manakāmanā shrine
43	Śivaliṅga	80	Exterior pond ( <i>gaihrīdhārā</i> )
44	Terrace	81	Gaṇeśa temple
45	Hari Hara	82	Chaitya
46	Main gate building	83	Kuntī <i>hiṭi</i>
47	Main gate	84	Śiva (Mṛtyumjaya?) and Pārvatī
48	Kuntī Maharāṇī	85	water spout with relief of unknown deity
49	Western entrance	86	Kārttikeya (Ghaṇṭākarṇa?)
50	Platform with śivaliṅga and Nandin	87	Śiva and Pārvatī
51	Interior pond	88	Stone relief of an unknown deity
52	Drain of interior pond with snake sculpture	89	Highly worn stone relief (Śiva Bhāskara?)
53	Inlet of interior pond with relief of Śiva and Pārvatī	90	Water spout with relief of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī
54	<i>Ghorī nāga</i>	91	Water spout with relief of unknown deity (Kāliyadamana)
55	Stone inscription	92	Water spout with relief of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī
56	Śiva temple	93	Umā-Maheśvara
57	<i>Pīpāl</i> tree	94	Stone relief of Viṣṇu
58	Śivaliṅga	95	Stone relief of unknown deity
59	Northeast entrance	96	Four reliefs of Viṣṇu
60	<i>Caturmukhaliṅga</i>	97	Chaitya
61	Gosaikund temple		
62	<i>Navagraha</i>		

### 3.5. Description of the main temple

The Kumbheśvara temple (Fig. 3, 3.1, 4) sits on a rectangular platform of about 11,1 x 11,6 x 0.6 meters. The base itself has 7,6 x 8 m. When viewed from the outside it seems as if the temple sits on a square platform or at least gives the impression that it was originally designed as a basement that looks like a square. (Fig. 4, 4.1) The height of the whole construction is approximately 23 m (Regmi 1966:357) and the narrow sides of the

temple face north and south. On the northern side is the entrance into the temple. The uppermost roof of the building is copper-covered; the first and the second roofs have six struts on each side, the third and fourth four on each side, the fifth two, and all have corner struts as well. In spite of the rectangular shape, all four sides have the same number of struts; between the struts of the lowest roof there is a fine trellised wooden balcony that can only be entered by a ladder through a small opening. This balcony space may be used mainly as a storage area. (Bernier 1978:90) On the second floor on the backside of the temple is a little window with an unidentified wooden figure looking out of it. The struts, which have been built into the balcony framework are used to stabilise the rooftops and depict several large and many-armed deities, each of them have a minor deity sitting at their feet. At the outer ends are small wind-bells (*ghānti*), which hang on each roof, the corners of the latter are pointing towards the sky. There is a single pinnacle on top, which consists of three levels and a small Śiva trident (*trishūla*), whose staff is carved as well. The *sanctum* is housed on the ground floor and can be seen through windows carved out of the wooden façades on each side. Around the *sanctum* is another wall, which creates an enclosed ambulatory where common devotees are not allowed to enter (Fig. 4.1). Only male Brahmins and members of the Bhandārī caste who work as caretakers (*deopālas*) for the temple are allowed to step into this area. While the caretakers assist the priest with the daily puja, the Brahman devotees often sit within the ambulatory and recite hymns dedicated to Śiva (*rudrī pāthas*).

On the southern side, however, the ambulatory is blocked by a little chamber. It is therefore not possible to walk all the way around or, as the temple priest emphasizes, due to this blockage, people have to walk within a crescent shape, as it is appropriate in temples dedicated to Śiva, according to the priest<sup>34</sup>. As with the façade around the inner *sanctum* there are openings on each side and one portal to enter the temple in the northern part. For the puja, however, only the western and the northern ones are used. The side lengths are 7.60 metres and 8 metres. (Wiesner 1978: 16-17, 42-43)

In front of the main entrance of the Kumbheśvara temple knees a gilded metal bull about 1 Meter in height (Fig. 5). Nandin is the famous mount of Śiva and can be found in front of nearly every temple dedicated to this god. King Jaya Viṣṇu donated the bull in 1735. Nearly 50 years later, in 1783 the metal animal was stolen and then replaced again by a large number of devotees, among them was the Shah King Rana Bahadur (reign:

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<sup>34</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, personal conversation, 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

1777-1799). (Hutt 1994:163) On both sides of the main entrance are two stone lions that serve as temple guards. According to D.R. Regmi (1966:880) the design of the doorways are taken directly from the Yakṣeśvara temple in Bhaktapur and their artistry reminds him of the ones at the Cāṅgu Nārāyana temple. The main struts of the temple show different Bhairavas with female consorts and can be distinguished by their mounts (*vāhana*) that are located underneath them and which are either lying humans or different kinds of animals. The deities all stand in the same posture under the leaves of a tree and thus resemble the early Indian tree-gods (*vrksadevatā*) who were primarily worshipped as protective deities (*Yakṣas* and *Yakṣinīs*). Four-headed and multi-armed forms of Bhairavas also appear in the panels at the side and bottom of the doors. Underneath them the Mother Goddesses are seated, each on a different mount. (cf. Hutt 1994:163 and Van Kooij 1978:12) All around the temple complex, a high brick wall encloses the sacred area with four entrance openings; the lower western one is the main entry of the compound. The origin of the temple style has yet remained unclear. Buildings with tiered roofs were already known in India and China before the time of Christ and it is certain that the Newar style of temple architecture was strongly influenced by its neighbours. The architecture and iconography of the five-storied main temple of the Kumbheśvara compound adapted strict rules according to specific Sanskrit works, all of them highly influenced by the Indic science of architecture (*vāstuvidyā*), which was probably brought to Nepal during the Licchavi period. According to Mary Slusser the Nepalese craftsmen used either classical Indian architectural manuals (*vāstuśāstras*), or Nepalese manuals that were orientated after the classical Indian works as guidelines, in order to conduct their work and thus followed the same practical and ritual requirements. The Newar style of architecture therefore did not emerge out of itself within isolated boarders, but remained open for outside influences. There are, however, descriptions from Chinese travellers, who visited the Kathmandu Valley in the 7<sup>th</sup> century that suggest that this style of roof was new to them. According to certain reports, this architectural style exists in the Nepal Valley already since the beginning of the Christian era. (Korn 1989:66)

The artistry of the Newars survived a strong period of transition and dominates the sacred as well as the profane townscape of all central Lalitpur until today. The materials used for the building and their combination, such as wood, earth and brick are regional specialities. A distinctive designation for the characteristic Newar construction style does not exist. Local appellations such as *mandir* (“temple”) are too unspecific and the term

“pagoda style” leads into a wrong direction because the only commonality between Pagoda style temples and the temples of the Kathmandu Valley consists in the practise of multiplication of the roofs, which is not always the case in this area. (Slusser 1982:129,130) Following Mary Slusser, the present work will therefore refer to the Nepalese building characteristics as “Newar Style” with regard to the ethnic group that is responsible for the major part of the Valleys architecture.

The Newar cult buildings are usually not accessible and therefore cannot be compared with churches or mosques, which offer a dwelling space for the local community. Their construction is rather a material symbol, signifying the place where the deity is manifesting. The reason lies in the Nepali worship, which is, beside many collective sacred rituals, a fundamentally individual matter. The devotee usually does not even have to enter, or penetrate the temple at all, but gives his offerings to a priestly intermediate that hands the material blessing of the deity (*prasāda*) over in return. Furthermore, it is not only the god-image, which is being venerated, but also the building itself. By conducting a clockwise circumambulation (Sk. *pradakṣinā*), the devotee pays reference to the venerated building. (Slusser 1982:128 ff.) The Newari temple is thus completely dedicated to the deity it shelters in its core. For a normal devotee, the *sanctum* is out of reach and thus represents its interiority, but also its unattainability, or royalty. Due to its symmetric layers, the temple building can also be interpreted as a body for the god or goddess it houses. The idea of a statue filled with life (of a deity) is thus being doubled and visualised. The basic perception of the temple thus follows the formula: idol : temple :: mind : body. (Gell 1998:136) The temple relates to the *sanctum* as the body to the mind. Just as the human mind is seen as a small entity that animates the body, the idol is seen as a force that animates the temple building, which therefore also has to be venerated.

### **3.6. Description of the objects and their position within the compound**

When entering the compound as a foreign visitor, the mass of objects, shrines and temples can trigger a feeling of disorientation. Everyone seems busy and indefatigably runs from one point to the next. As an outsider it is impossible to know how to use the space in the local way. In order to keep up with the inner, practical knowledge of the locals, a map drawn by David Gellner during his visit of the temple complex in the late

1990s was used and the most frequent ways the visitors walk were marked. Additionally a map drawn by Vitus Angermeier and another one by Bina Paudyal served for better orientation as they localised most of the temples, shrines and objects situated within the compound. In general these maps are an abstraction of the natural surrounding, by which all possible routes that practically can exist within this bordered space can be seen. The following paragraph provides a fictitious “walk” through the compound from object to object, which reveals their inherent iconographical messages.

In the back of the main temple stands a Gaṇeśa temple (Fig. 6) with a sunken bull in front of it. As mentioned above, bulls are usually exclusively placed in front of temples dedicated to Śiva, which is why this forms an awkward composition. Underneath the *sanctum sanctorum* -a carved stone statue of Gaṇeśa (Fig. 6.1) - an inscription indicates that the name of this god is Haridrā Gaṇeśa, one of the 32 forms mentioned in the *Mudgala Purāṇa*. According to a local, this place is particularly healing for people who suffer from stomach illnesses, but most of the people come here to worship Gaṇeśa before they go to the shrine of Bagalāmukhī, as the elephant headed god, so the locals belief, has always to be worshipped first. *Haridrā* means “turmeric” and therefore indicates the colour yellow, which is the ascribed colour of Bagalāmukhī who emerged out of a turmeric pond. “Shri Maa Bagalamukhi obliged and she told Shri Haridra Ganesha that ‘Whoever worships you; they will obtain whatever they ask for – that too very fast and quickly. Those whose golden phase of life is about to begin, will start to worship Shri Haridra Ganesha.’” (URL 1:2010)

Right beside the Gaṇeśa temple is a Śiva temple (Fig. 7) with Nandin kneeling in front of it. The temple houses a four-faced *śivaliṅga* (*caturmukhaliṅga*) that seems to be a replica of the Paśupathinātha temple (Fig. 7.1). On the right side, built-into the wall, there is a stone relief of a couple representing the donors. Subsequently, one stands in front of a Sarasvatī shrine (Fig. 8) with an unknown stone statue on the left and a Nārayaṇa statue with two attendants on the right backside. Sometimes young students can be witnessed, when they light a candle in front of the shrine, in order to pray to the goddess of knowledge, music and arts, when there is an important exam coming up. After passing the two stone guards of the Kailāśa region and two stone reliefs of Lakṣmī and Nārayaṇa in the act of creating all the gods, one stands in front of two bigger stone statues of Śiva and his wife Pārvatī, locally worshipped as Gaurī and Śaṅkara (Fig. 9). In his analyse of the standing statue of Pārvatī, Pratapaditya Pal compares her with the Deo Patan Devī

who, according to Pal, seems to have been the model for the Kumbheśvara Pārvatī. (Pal 1975:57-58) In both statues the legs are columnar and rigid and support bounteous hips. The garment falls down between their legs. Around their feet are heavy anklets and around the neck the statues are both wearing a necklace in the same design. Due to the shape of Pārvatīs crown and her ornaments as well as the form of her drapery and the Lotus in her right hand, Pal concludes that the statue might have been sculpted by the artists of the Thākurī or the early Malla periods and therefore locates it in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The oval nimbus and the flame surrounding it, as well as the bead boarder make it also possible that the origin of the statue dates back until the time of the Licchavis (300- ca. 879). The statue of Śiva was probably added later. (Hutt 1994:164) The two deities are portrayed as hieratic figures. Śivas form is non-ityphallic and does not consist of a third eye on his forehead; a crown covers his hair. Śiva carries his rosary like Viṣṇu holds his wheel in his upper right hand. In his upper left hand he holds his trident and his attributes are the same as in a typical Umā-Maheśvara relief. This type of hieratic icon enjoyed less popularity among the Nepalese artists than the Umā-Maheśvara sculptures. (Pal 1974:97) Right beside is an unknown stone statue (Fig. 10) made between the early 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century with a size of 38x44cm. The locals come here to worship the statue as Śītalā, the goddess of small pox or as the Buddhist pendant called Hārītī. Due to its position of the legs however, the statue seems more to be a male than a female. (cf: Pal 1975:41, Slusser 1972:102) The sculpture is standing in the *samabhaṅga* pose and carries a lotus in its right hand and an unidentifiable object in the left hand. On its right side, carved into the same stone, is an unknown figure of a male, receiving an object between the palms of its hands. On the other side is a very worn figure of a female. Around the left corner are two additional figures, one more female holding an object and above a princely male sitting in the *lalitāsana* position. The locals worship them as the five symbolic children of Hārītī who are gathering around her mother. Slusser concludes that if these figures represent children then the main statue, since it is unmistakeably male, must be the *Yakṣa* Pāñcika, the consort of Śītalā and also a protector of children. His unpopularity in Nepal may be the reason why only his female consort is being worshipped. Other opinions claim that the statue may depict a Bodhisattva due to the statues clothing (*dhotī* and sash). Pal suggests that the statue depicts Viṣṇu. According to his analysis, the male attendant could be the personification of the lotus (*padmapuruṣa*) and the other, the female personification of the mace (*gadanārī*). On the side is another

female that could represent Lakṣmī or Bhūdevī that are both consorts of Viṣṇu. The figure above seated in the *lalitāsana* position could be an attendant deity. The statue's two arms can be explained by the Viṣṇuparmottara Purāṇa, which preserves a tradition of depicting Viṣṇu with two arms instead of four and the personified *cakrapuruṣa* as a pot-bellied dwarf. (Pal 1974:41) In the report of MYSCDA (Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, Department of Archaeology), the unnamed writer identifies the statue as Sūrya, due to its standard attribute, the lotus. The author emphasizes the rareness of the statue and that no such figure can be found in any ancient icons. The latter would place it into the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century. (MYSCDA 1996:14) Hidden in the back of the statue, however, there is another carving of a female figure, about 40 cm in height and probably made much later. It carries a long skirt, which is draped in a sash. Around its shoulders falls a scarf and its hands loosely hang down. The left hand holds an unidentifiable object and the right one is in the *varada mudrā*. Together with this figure they are seven, which may explain the identification of the statue as Śītalā who is the seventh of seven Sisters. The statues venerated as Śītalā/Hārītī rarely or never depict the goddesses in their conventional iconography, but rather, as in the case given above, in the disguise of another deity or in undifferentiated statues of the mother goddesses which are often very old and worn beyond recognition. The cult of the small pox goddess in the Kathmandu Valley therefore probably represents a much older, indigenous cult, which later merged with Hindu-Buddhist concepts from India and thus had been veiled by denoting it with acceptable names. “More often than not, the imported Buddhist and Brahmanical goddess have been grafted onto ancient indigenous ‘root’ divinities, the ubiquitous ‘mothers’ and ‘grandmothers’, *maīs* and *ajīmās*, whose cult practises and legends reinforce aspects of the goddesses that in ancient India had already contributed to the formation of the developed Hindu-Buddhist pantheon.” (Slusser 1982:307) A local temple worker, however, explains that the statue in the back is Hārītī and the one in the front Śītalā, which is quite confusing since, as mentioned above, they are both the same goddess. When someone has a problem with their health, the informant continues, this is the “section” to perform the appropriate rituals.

According to Linda Iltis, Hārītī is known as the Buddhist goddess of protection and sometimes, as in this case, identified in a non-buddhist context with the Hindu goddess of smallpox Śītalā. Her popularity stems partly from her association as preventer of the smallpox disease during a time where the malady raged throughout the country.

Nowadays, however, Hārītī is mostly venerated and consulted to eradicate physical and psychological illnesses that have no connection to smallpox. The goddess is believed to cure children most effectively and to help prevent diseases. She is also invoked for issues concerning pregnancy, childbirth and fertility. (Iltis 2002:71) Within the Kumbheśvara temple compound, however, it is the statue of Unmatta Bhairava that is visited for specific rituals concerning fertility. Especially older woman wanting to conceive go there to worship him. The tantric mother goddesses of the Kathmandu Valley are especially feared for conveying diseases, such as smallpox in the case of Śītalā /Hārītī. They were viewed as the personification of the malady and also as its cause and thus had to be rendered mild by offerings and certain rituals. Since there have been many epidemics of small pox in the Kathmandu Valley, lots of cults surrounding the goddesses have emerged.

Only one meter further is an interesting statue from the third or fourth century with a size of 104x38cm. (MYSCDA 1996:15) Many locals recognise the statue as Vāsuki (Fig. 11), the personified serpent king (*nāgarāja*) and devotee of Viṣṇu. It is seated in the *lalitāsana* pose on a coil of a serpent whose many heads are serving as a canopy for the deities head. His right hand is open in the boon-granting gesture (*varada*) and in his left hand he carries a blossomed lotus. Around his neck falls a big necklace whose shoulder parts are covered by big earrings that depict two bunches of flowers, on his head resides a crown. His clothing consists of a *dhoṭī* and a sash bound across his thighs. The quality of the statue and the hole in his forehead that probably once carried a jewel indicates, that it must have been an important object of worship in the past, probably connected with the *nāga*-cult (snake-cult) that used to play a major role in ancient Nepalese traditions. This is already indicated in the founding legend of the Kathmandu Valley that associates its very origin with the *nāgas*. It is believed that the Valley used to be a big lake called Kālīhrada (Kālīs pond) or Nāgavāsa (dwelling place of the snakes), before Manjuśri (or, in the Hindu version, Viṣṇu) pushed his sword into the ground and drained its waters. The nine chief snakes glided away together with the water, but are believed to have later returned to preside over several *tīrthas* located near ponds, rivers or springs. One of these *nāgas* is Vāsuki and therefore used to be worshipped as the guardian over sacred water places. “Thus, the absence of early sculptures representing *nāgas* would be more difficult to explain than their presence.” (Pal 1975:49) The art historian compares the statue with several others that were made around the 5<sup>th</sup> century and locates the snake god

(*nāgadeva*) into the same time area. Here it is important to recall the stone inscription from the 15<sup>th</sup> century as mentioned above, which lists the objects that king Jayasthitimalla (reign: 1382-1395) found, after draining the water from the pond situated within the temple compound. One of them, as is written, was a statue of Vāsuki and it is thus very likely, that the statue of the *nāgadeva* and this statue of Vāsuki that was found in the pond in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by king Jayasthitimalla, are one and the same. The physical presence of this statue within the compound makes it very likely that a snake-cult dominated the religious activities in this area before the Śaiva-cult has taken over. This assumption will be elucidated more closely in chapter 5.1.

In the back corner further behind are two stone-reliefs depicting the Umā-Maheśvara theme (Fig.12); The one on the left is already in a ruinous state, but the figure of Śiva sitting in the *lalitāsana* position and his wife Umā with Nandin in the back, can still be recognized.

The panel could be dated to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century and has a size of 32x30cm. (MYSCDA 1996:11) The Umā-Maheśvara relief on the right side seems to be younger due to its different compositional and iconographic style which points to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Śiva has four hands and sits in the *lalitāsana* position while holding beads in his upper right hand and a lotus in his upper left. His lower right hand is doing the *varada* gesture and with the lower one he holds Umā's hand. Umā sits with her right foot on the seat and her left foot hanging, (*vāmārdhaparyanika* posture) while slightly turning towards her husband. In her right hand she holds something that could be a lotus. On her left side is the figure of a child that could be Kumāra. Besides the child on the left, sits a female attendant with a *chauri* (fan used for ceremonies) in her right hand and offerings in her left hand. Nandin sits on the right of Śiva as well as a guardian deity holding a trident in his hand. Both Umā and Maheśvara have an oval halo carved in the back of their heads that signifies their important status. The relief is about 46cm in length and 46cm wide. (MYSCDA 1996:12) Walking up the stairs beside the Sarasvatī shrine, one reaches the “Kailāśa area” which is typical for temple compounds dedicated to Śiva. The mythical home of the ascetic god and his family is covered with flowerbeds to symbolize the place where Nandin grazed. It is situated about 2 meters above the temple base. Beside a *śivalinga* with a *trisūla*, one finds a copy of a relief depicting Umā-Maheśvara, Śiva with his family on Mount Kailāśa. Since the original was stolen about 10 years ago and never returned, the temple staff decided to hire a craftsman to make a copy using an old

photograph of the original as a guideline. Back on the ground level, covering the southern side of the compound, another temple is located housing both a tall wooden statue of Unmatta Bhairava (Fig. 13) and the shrine of the tantric mother goddess Bagalāmukhī (Fig. 14). The ityphallic, ten-armed statue of Unmatta Bhairava serves as the formers consort. According to local belief, this image of Bhairava can represent the female potential for pregnancy. Together with his consort Bagalāmukhī, he is also known as the distributor and the protector of cholera. Bhairava is known as the fierce manifestation of Śiva and plays a central role in the religious life of the Newars. In Nepal, there are eight popular manifestations of Bhairava: Akasha Bhairava, Kala Bhairava, Mahankala Bhairava, Kṛtimukha Bhairava, Sweta Bhairava, Pachali Bhairava, Bagha Bhairava and finally, Unmatta Bhairava, as he is present in the temple compound. The stone inscription, which is situated near the statue dates from NS 543 (1422 AD). It says, that in order to pacify Śītalā, king Jayasthitimalla erected a statue of Unmatta Bhairava, and to ease his fury he placed an Āgamadevatā above him. (Wright 2007:183) Due to the role Bhairava played in Śaktism, his cult, and the ones of the terrific aspects of the mother goddesses merged. Bhairava is the consort of 64 *yoginīs*, of Śakti and of all the collective forms of Durgā. Therefore he can also be found near Bagalāmukhī, one of Durgās collective manifestations, and Śītalā/Hārītī, who used to be identified as the malevolent distributors and personifications of a deadly disease.

Only a few meters further Bagalāmukhī's shrine (Fig. 14) is situated which attracts a large number of devotees all over the year. Bagalāmukhī is one of the ten Hindu tantric goddesses known as the Das Mahāvidyās, a collective manifestation of Durgā, which has been developed out of the Śakti-cult in India. The practises and cults are thus strongly rooted in tantra and can be aimed at the whole collective, but also at each goddess of the group separately. In Nepal most of the female goddesses are syncretistic and worshipped by *sivamargi* and *buddhamargi*. As was already mentioned above, very often they are imported goddesses of the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon, which have been projected onto ancient indigenous goddesses, the *māts* and *ajimās*. Even though they cannot be clearly allocated to a specific group of deities, the bond of tantra and the base of Śaktism consolidate all the fierce aspects of the female goddesses in the Kathmandu Valley. Bagalāmukhī is represented by a concave stone garlanded with a metal crown on a “bottomless” pit, as is typical for tantric goddesses within temple compounds. The rectangular one-storied temple, in which Bagalāmukhīs shrine is situated, has three

doorways, all of them with a *torāṇa* (tympanum) on top. On the temple roof one can find two miniature rooftops made out of brass and three pinnacles covered by an umbrella (*chakra*). In front of it is a pillar on which resides Bagalāmukhīs mount, the tiger. In 1931 a silver door and a silver *torāṇa* were given by the Rana Prime Minister, Bhim Shamsher to indicate her popularity. Only recently, in 1997, this *torāṇa* was given to the Patan museum in order to preserve its original structure, and a copy has been made to replace it. Not even ten years later, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March in 2009, a fire broke out inside the temple and destroyed a major part of the inner structure. According to a local newspaper the incident happened due to a short-circuit that occurred in the middle of the night. “(...) the blazing fire destroyed almost all important artefacts inside the temple by the time it was completely extinguished.” (URL 4:2010) The metal frame and the shrine itself could be saved. The background wall, however, as well as the wooden structure and the bricks had to be replaced, which was conducted by the Bagalāmukhī Renovation Committee. A local resident explains, that the part where the statue of Bhairava resides, has not been affected by the fire and that the renovation committee only decided recently (during the time of research) to renovate it. In the southeastern part of the compound, both the Kedarnarayana (Fig. 15) and the Badrinarayana (Fig. 16) temples are situated. The first one is two-storied and houses a stone statue of Viṣṇu with his four typical attributes, a lotus (*padma*), a mace (*gada*), a conch (*sankha*) and a discus (*chakra*). On his left and right are two small stone figures of his attendants. On each side of the temple under both of the roofs are small windows carved out of wood. The equally wooden struts depict male and female tree-deities with an exception on the northern side, where Viṣṇu’s *avatāra*, Narasimha is carved into it. Similarly, the Badrinarayana temple is also two-storied with small windows carved on each side. Most of the struts have already been replaced with normal wooden boards, the rest depict tree gods and goddesses. Another interesting object is located in the left part of the main gate building, a statue of the syncretistic god Hari Hara, or Hari Śaṅkara, as the locals call it (Fig. 17). The right half of the image holds a trident, a drum, a water pot and a rosary and thus represents Śiva in the form of Hara. The left side holds a mace, a conch, a discus and a lotus and therefore represents Viṣṇu in the form of Hari. Each side has its consort: Pārvatī on Śivas side and Viṣṇus Lakṣmī on the left. Additionally, the right foot of the statue stands on Śivas mount Nandin and the left foot on Viṣṇus mount Garuḍa. The main gate building, (Fig. 18) where the statue of Hari Hara is situated consists of two stories and is made out

of wood, while the roof is covered with tiles. According to Michael Hutt, it was a wealthy man from Kathmandu who built the house in 1780. (Hutt 1994:163) The god-guardians (*deopālas*) of Bagalāmukhī, called Kāpali, used to live in it, but nowadays it is mostly temporarily used by pilgrims or wandering *yogins*. In the evening people from the temple area meet in the right part of the ground floor and play religious music dedicated to the gods and goddesses within the compound (*bhajana mandala*) and every Wednesday women gather in the upper part of the building in order to receive free medical advice concerning pregnancy. Above the main gate (Fig. 19) there is a round wooden window, which is supported by thirteen artistically carved rearing horses that are each about 20 cm high (Fig. 19.1). Additionally one can find flying Apsaras, all sorts of beasts and several minor deities as well as some sexual scenes above the upper frame. Around the main entrance there are several stalls where offerings and oil lamps can be bought. Inside the right part of the building, there is a black statue with a broken face (Fig. 20). A local visitor explains that it depicts Kuntī Maharāṇī, who is the mother of the Pāndavas in the epic Mahābhārata. He adds, however, that the name of king Lokaprakāśamalla's wife has also been Kuntī and that the latter built the statue for her during his reign from 1684-1705.<sup>35</sup> Due to the presence of the statue, however, the local area is also known as "Kuntī area" and the exterior pond as "Kuntī *hītī*".

Walking further into the northern part of the compound, one stands in front of a big water pond (*pokhari*) whose entrances are guarded by large statues of lions and four stone apes sitting on the corner piles (Fig. 21). In 1809 Hanuman Singh Amatya and his three brothers repaired the tank after an earthquake happened in 1808. (Hutt 1994:163) The pond is also mentioned in the legend of Lalit given above, as the place, from where the settlement started. In the southern wall of the tank is a little enshrined stone that locals worship as the holy serpent of the place (Fig. 22). They call him *ghai nāga* (leprosy serpent) in remembrance of the legendary farmer Lalit whose leprosy was cured after he washed his face with the water of this tank as was recounted in chapter 3.1. The *ghai nāga* receives cotton offerings from the locals who hope that this helps against their eye and skin ailments for which serpents are believed to be the cause. The responsible authorities fill the tank with water once a year during the time of Janaipūrṇimā, when it turns into the centre of attention during the Kumbheśvara *melā*, in the course of an ancient procession. They fill the tank with water and install a linga in its centre, which is

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<sup>35</sup> Local visitor, personal conversation, 11<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

covered by a sheath depicting a coiled up snake (Fig. 23). There will be more detailed information about the festival in a later chapter.

The Gosaikund temple (Fig. 24), situated between the main temple and the pond, is also part of the cult. This temple covers the famous spring whose water is believed to come directly from the lake Gosaikund, which is located in the middle hills of the Himalayas within the Rasuwa district. The temple additionally contains a *sivalinga* and a statue of Rāma in the lower part and in the upper part a statue of Hari Hara with four attendants, probably from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century (Hutt 1994:165,166) and a statue of Viṣṇu and of Umā-Maheśvara. The northwestern side of the compound is occupied by a large meetinghouse for the local community (Fig. 25) that was built in 1986 with a donation of 700 000 Rupees given by the former kings brother Dhirendra. “In spite of the traditional style windows, both the dimensions and the technique of construction of the meeting house are completely modern, and some would call it an architectural solecism.” (Hutt 1994:163). The building however, is being used for several purposes, all concerning local events. The upper part used to be an UNESCO office and is now, among other things, a Karate training school for children.

A bit further on the right is a fairly new temple dedicated to Hārītī, the Buddhist goddess of smallpox and patroness of children and birth (Fig. 26). Oral traditions and early Buddhist texts refer to a legend in which Hārītī was made to dance during her pregnancy, which led to a miscarriage and the loss of her child. This incident triggered such hatred in the goddess that it turned her into an ogress in her following life. She gave birth to 500 children and made a vow to eat all other children of the city Rājgriha in order to nourish her own. This gave her the nickname “Hārītī,” or “Stealer of children”. When the Buddha heard about her malevolent activities, he decided to steal her youngest favourite child and hid it under his begging bowl. Hārītī, desperate after realising that her child was gone, went to the Buddha to ask for help. He asked the goddess why she felt bad about the loss of one child out of 500, when other mothers lose their one and only child. The Buddha demonstrated how miserable those mothers, whose children were eaten up by Hārītī, may feel. After hearing this, the goddess converted to Buddhism and made a vow to stop killing children and to start protecting them. The Buddha promised her that his monks would from now on regularly provide food for her and her 500 children. Hārītī thus turned from a “Stealer of children” into a “Remover of suffering”. (Iltis 2007:72-73) As the legend suggests, Hārītī is strongly associated with Buddhism.

As a matter of fact, however, Buddhists and Hindus alike worship her for the same purpose within the Kumbheśvara temple. Hārītī is believed to have the power to cure people suffering from black magic diseases. The fact that a Buddhist goddess managed to prevail her Hindu equivalent, Śitālā, points towards a strong Buddhist presence within the area. Her temple was built only in 1991 after a group of locals of the Khadgī caste spoke up for it. The main protagonist of this undertaking was Indra Bahadur Khadgī, who, as it is said among some locals, has been obsessed by Hārītī. The goddess then ordered him to build the temple. Another local story recounts, that the second reason to build the temple was, that they wanted an additional Hārītī temple within the Kathmandu Valley, because the one situated at the temple complex Svayambhunātha is too far away. During the time of research, her temple was considered to be one of the three most important temples within the compound, right after Kumbheśvara and Bagalāmukhī. Hārītī's *deopālas* are from a Thāpā-family that belongs to the Chetri caste.

After having talked with several locals and other visitors of her shrine, it seemed quite apparent that a distinction between Śitālā and Hārītī is not made anymore. Śitāla, as many people confirmed, used to be famous when the smallpox virus terrorised the area. Since the virus is nowadays under control, there is no urgent need to worship the goddess anymore. Hārītī on the other hand, is still very popular and people worship her to be safe from "black magic" or evil spells from "witches." Hārītī is believed, as was mentioned above, to have the power to cure people suffering from black magic diseases. Both Hindus and Buddhists worship her for the same purpose. The distinction between Śitāla and Hārītī is not being made by their religious affiliation, but by the function they perform.

Finally the last two shrines are dedicated to Lalitādevī and Manakāmanā. Aniconic stones situated within a shrine along a wall represent both of them. After passing them one arrives back at the shrine dedicated to Bagalāmukhī. Outside of the compound in the west, there are two sunken fountains. The smaller one (Fig. 27) is directly in front of the main entrance and leans against the outer wall of the main entrance building. It is known as *gaihrīdhārā*, the woman's fountain. The *chaitya* in its centre dates back to the Licchavi period and was renovated by a goldsmith in 1414 in the name of his dead wife. (Gellner 1994:160) After passing the exterior Ganēśa temple (Fig. 28) and another *chaitya*, one reaches a larger fountain (Fig. 29), situated on the opposite side of the "woman's fountain." The locals call it Kuntī *hiti*, named after the Kuntī statue within the compound.

On the southern wall is a finely carved stone relief of Śiva and Pārvatī (Fig. 30). They both hold a small water pot in their hands and are surrounded by their sons, attendants and two heavenly beings. This image is a rare depiction of Śiva holding a water pot with his two palms and may be an invention during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in order to stress the idea of Śiva as Kumbheśvara, Lord of the water pot. In the western part of the fountain is an old stone relief of Kārttikeya (Fig. 31), who is one of the two sons of Śiva and Pārvatī, with two attendants kneeling beside him. His earrings, however, look like two little bells and thus suggest that the relief may also depict Ghaṇṭakarna, a mythical demon connected with Śiva. Another rare image is the stone relief depicting Umā-Maheśvara on the sacred mountain Kailaśa. (Fig. 32) The couple is surrounded by guardian deities, attendants and Śivas vehicle the bull. Underneath them are dancing Ganas and their son Gaṇeśa. This relief is one of the last of its kind that has not been stolen yet. In the centre of the fountain stand four identical stone reliefs of Viṣṇu with his consort Lakṣmī and his mount Garuḍa, each are facing into one of the cardinal directions (Fig. 33). Finally a statue of an unknown deity (Fig. 34) stands on the upper platform in the western part. The statue's face is worn and it holds an unidentifiable object between its palms. According to the main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple it depicts king Bhagiratha, who brought the river Ganges to earth.

When observing the visitors on their routes from shrine to shrine one quickly finds a major course of action that is taken by most of the visitors. Here is an example of a typical route, which was taken from the field notes:

15<sup>th</sup> of August 2010:

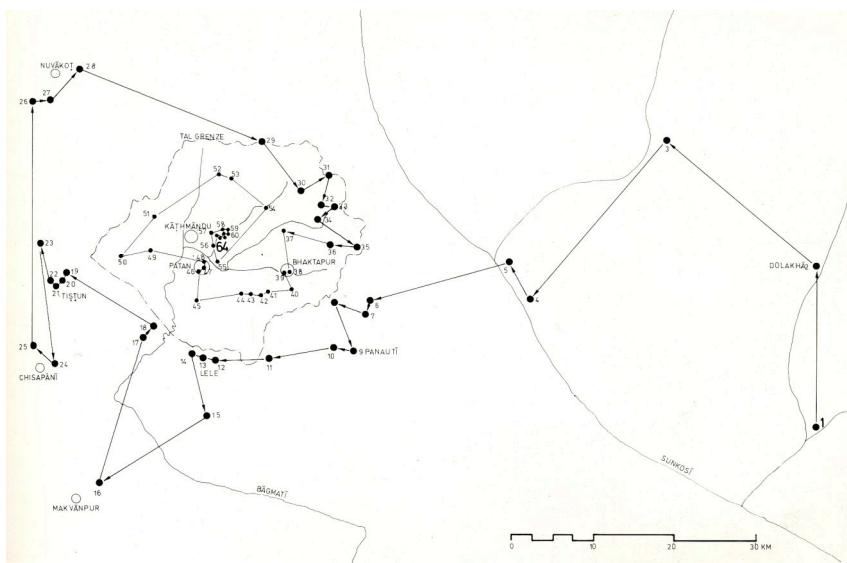
“Two young girls stand in front of the main entrance of the Kumbheśvara temple. They take some *jala* from its ledge and sprinkle it on each other two times. Then they mark a *tikā* on their foreheads and put some flowers into their hair (also taken from the window board). They go to the northern entrance, where they take a look at the *sanctum*, fold their hands and descent the stairs towards the inner pond. Leaving the statue of Viṣṇu and Garuḍa on the left hand side, they go to the Hārītī temple from the backside. There they play a popular skill game, where the wishes of those persons are supposed to come true who manage to turn blind across their own axis and then hit the folded hands into the triangular hole carved into the backside of the temple. Then they go to the main entrance, to the Lalitādevī shrine, to the Gaṇeśa temple and then to Bagalāmukhī. There they remain for a while, light up a candle and then return to the main entrance to sit and chat”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Field journal, 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2010.

For the majority of people that come to pay their respect to the gods and goddesses within the compound, the route starts at the main entrance of the Kumbheśvara temple, where they offer oil lamps or coins to receive a blessing. The route continuous clockwise to the Northern entrance where a door leads into the inside of the temple. From there the temple can be entered and another look can be made on the *sanctum*. The steps facing the entrance lead the devotee down to the Gosaikund temple, which, during the research period, most of the people quickly passed in order to head directly to the water pond to watch the preparations that where being made for the upcoming Kumbheśvara *melā*. From there, the majority passes the statue of Viṣṇu sitting on Garuḍa from the left side and continues to the Hārītī temple, coming from the backside. Passing both the Lalitādevī and the Manakāmanā shrines, the route continues through a narrow passage with the Gaṇeśa temple on the right side, the latter is usually being visited shortly. The route ends at the Bagalāmukhī temple where most of the people gather and remain for a longer while. From there, the compound is being left through the main gate.

### 3.7. Ordering the objects into a sacred landscape



landscape in various ways. A *mandala* can emanate from a centre and expand in circles into its surrounding. But also the orthogonal street crosses of Lalitpur, as discussed above (Map 2) can be considered as *mandala*, applied onto the landscape. The Sarveśvara linga inside the Kumbheśvara temple is part of an unusual example of a *mandala*, projected onto topography. It belongs to the group of 64 *śivalingas* whose order goes back to the rule of the Shah dynasty that copied the model from India, where the *śivalingas* are distributed throughout the continent. The Hindu rulers wanted to determine an orthodox shaivaite model of order upon the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. When connecting these lingas with each other, they form a supra-regional spiral around the Paśupatinātha temple and thus determine it as the centre. The ritual visit of these temples, however, got lost throughout the time, because the Newars did not feel attached to them. The distinct temples are therefore not ritually connected anymore and only serve as distinct entities for annual celebrations. (Gutschow 1982:21 ff.)

Beyond the order of temples and shrines, a *mandala* can also be applied to the topography of a whole country. “A Mandala is a circle, a mystic diagram of varied form, and in ancient Indian usage signified an administrative unit or a country. From at least the sixth century A.D., in conjunction with the word “Nepal,” it signified to the Nepalese the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding territory.” (Slusser 1982:ix) The name “Nepal” long meant only the area of the Kathmandu Valley and barely reached further than the Sunkośī river in the east and the Triśuli in the west. The Valley was then known as Nepālmaṇḍala (circle, or country of Nepal) and its native inhabitants were considered to be the Newars. After the conquest of the Gorkhalis in 1768 the new rulers expanded the concept onto the whole of Nepal and integrated the Valley into a wider *mandala*. Again, the cosmological model is not only applied to the country as a whole, but also to distinct cities, temples, and shrines and even to the human body. Each group of temples or shrines that is based upon a certain geometrical order, or orientates towards the four cardinal directions can be described as a *mandala* image. The goal is to settle within an ideal order and thus to sanctify the landscape. According to Gutschow, *mandalas* are the archetypes of cosmological order. (Gutschow 1982:183)

For one and the same settlement or temple compound, however, different models can be applied. A Buddhist will understand a sacred topography in another way to, for example, a Hindu and vice versa. For an outsider the specific order is impossible to see. Only during ritual ceremonies, as for example during the so-called *jātrās*, the model

becomes visible, because the “god-image” or devotee walks along its lines. *Jātrā* means “journey” in Nepali and denotes seasonal Newar festivities that include a certain processional route. “Streng genommen bezeichnet *jātrā* die Wege des Gläubigen oder Pilgers, oder aber der Götterfigur, die ebenso auf Prozessionswegen getragen oder gefahren wird.” (Gutschow 1982:186) During the ritual the cosmological order is being reactivated and confirmed by the people who participate. This is also what happens during the annual Kumbheśvara *jātra*, which will be described more closely in a later chapter. The processions in Newar cities and villages do not lead around, but through the city. The idea is to connect important *tīrthas* with each other. In Lalitpur the procession route orientates after the city cross (Map 2) and is arranged after 24 caskets (*dābu*) that mark the stations. One of them is the Kumbheśvara temple compound, which is why most of the *jātrās* also lead through the it. Other orientation marks in Lalitpur are the four *stūpas* on the outskirts of the city and the shrines of the Aṣṭamātrikā, the eight mother goddesses, which are installed around the city.

Another spatial “reactivation” of cosmological order is the holy circumvention around sacred objects or places. These so-called *pradakṣiṇās* (Sk. “to the south,” *dakṣiṇā*: “the south”) follow the movement of the sun by always keeping the venerated object on the right-hand side. This movement is in the Indian rites as important as the ritual visit, or eye contact (*darśana*) with the venerated deity. By circulating the god-image, so it is believed, the devotee participates in the qualities of the sacred place by defining its borders. According to the Indologist Axel Michaels these circumambulations are made in order to gain a certain „sacral potency“, which is enclosed within the shrines or temples. In Hindu religious thought the cardinal points are not only physical-spatial routes or directions, but also agencies that inherit a certain power within themselves. (Michaels 2006:318) They are absolute categories that cannot be made relative to their viewpoints and imply something that Michaels calls “spheres of existence” or *loka* (Sk.), a *specific* space, as space itself does not exist within Hindu-religious thought. The ablation of a place from its substance is barely possible within a religious context. Neither is the abstraction of localization as relation. Each determination of a place is thus a mixture of basically equivalent powers and neither egocentric, nor geocentric. (Michaels 2006:317) The cardinal directions in Hindu religious thought are therefore not only topographical areas, as could be seen from the viewpoint of the modern perception of space referring to Aristoteles and Galilei, but more specific entities that open a certain

potential. They cannot be reduced, rationalised or abstracted from their substance, due to their identification with the “Other World” that exists in *illo tempore*, a mythological time-space, and therefore abolish the chronological, profane time order. As a result, the movement to the south, or standing “in the south”, can be either auspicious or ominous, which opens up a possible interrelationship between space and social order.

These two rituals, the *jātrā* and the *pradakṣiṇā* are thus being conducted to inspect a border and to create a sacred space. In Lalitpur, however, the *jātrās* mostly lead through the city and only serve as formal processions. In both cases, however, the main purpose is to create a certain psychological image, a “psycho- cosmogram” (Gutschow 1982:14) to depict the cosmological order in space.

When looking at the map of the Kumbheśvara temple compound (Map 3), certain rules of sacred order can be discovered. The shrine of the tantric goddess Bagalāmukhī (Fig. 14) for example, is placed in the southern part of the compound. According to the space categories of the Vedas, south is related with death, sexuality and violence. Therefore it is no surprise that both Unmatta Bhairava (Fig. 13), the fierce manifestation of Śiva in his tantric form and Bāgālamukhi, one of the Ten Mahāvidyās, all manifestations of the goddess Durgā, are situated within that same space. On the opposite side in the north is the temple of Kumbheśvara (Fig. 3) facing in the direction of Śivas divine home on Mount Kailaśa in the northern Himalayas. The tantric goddess Bagalāmukhī is facing the temple of the high, brahmanical god Kumbheśvara and thus forms a counterbalance within the compound, which is symbolised by the cardinal directions within which they are situated, i.e. north and south. The presence of these two unequal deities situated so close to each other indicates the merging of two streams of Hinduism within the compound. On the one side, symbolised by the north and represented by Kumbheśvara, is the vegetarian sector of Brahmanism with its strict rules of purity and impurity. On the other side, symbolised by the south is the tantric form of Hinduism, which is being practised by the Newars, who strongly worship Bagalāmukhī. Their festivals normally include alcohol and blood sacrifice, which is a strict taboo for the Brahmins. This spatial antagonism is being solved, by considering Bagalāmukhī as a manifestation of the goddess Durgā, who again is a manifestation of Pārvatī, the wife of Śiva. In this case, the two streams of Hinduism are literally “married” with each other. The area where the Kumbheśvara temple compound is situated is mainly inhabited by

Newars, who propagate the cult within the compound. The interior pond (Fig. 21) is situated in the north, referring to the direction where the lake of Gosaikund is situated and thus symbolising it. Also in the north is a platform, on which a neglected *sivalinga* with a stone statue of Nandin resides. Due to its structural shape and cardinal position, the platform could have been a former Kailaśa, pointing towards the home of Śiva and his family in the northern hills. Why the current Kailaśa is being placed in the southeast could not be answered. In general, the east is associated with birth and the west with death. The goddess Hārītī, whose fairly new temple (Fig. 26) is also situated in the east, may sometimes still be feared due to her former identity as a devourer of children, but is nowadays mostly known as their protector as well as a care taker of new-born babies. The position of her temple thus makes sense and it therefore can be speculated, that the ancient understanding of sacred space is still alive.

As should now be apparent, the sacred landscape of the Kumbheśvara compound is permeated with meaning that is linked with its mythological past, with its sages, demons, gods and goddesses that represent an ulterior landscape, which again is connected with its physical surrounding. The objects within the compound, or rather the space of the compound itself therefore serves as a constant pool of possibilities. While the outside is an area of day-to-day, chaotic activities or ostensible potentialities, the sacred presence of Śiva and his Śakti (Bagalāmukhī) offers a timeless space for background potentialities, an abstract stage of possibilities similar to the map referred to above. The notion of time as it exists outside of the sacred compound is being abrogated through a constant repetition of action, as well as a perpetuating, or dynamic intercommunion between the immediate quotidian life in the “here and now” with the underlying mythological space. As “emptiness” represents the purest form of potentiality, the temple compound is being cleared of mundane artefacts, and therefore “purified” and turned into a representation of an ideal space, where no “impure” materials, such as leather goods, are allowed. The stone images of the gods, as well as the worshipper become part of this representation and materialise the mythological background. Each visitor therefore steps into a landscape where the profane constraints of everyday life are left behind and one steps into an idealised world of possibilities where the whole universe has been modelled according to Hindu-religious thought. Every god or goddess of importance seems to be present within the area and it thus represents a tiny model of the vast Hindu pantheon. An

example would be the recognition of Paśupati in the four-faced *śivalinga*, (Fig. 7) or the recent construction of Harītī’s temple. Both of these deities are very popular and important in the Kathmandu Valley, and therefore had to be added to the model. This model is thus not a static and unchangeable space, but, on the contrary, shaped by the people and their social activities. Different gods and goddesses, groups, ritual specialists and institutions are constantly trying to remain in power. They contest and fight each other, in order to remain on top of the hierarchy. The influence of an object or the importance of a shrine is therefore convertible and in constant flux. The idealised landscape is not a static space, based on a rigid belief system, but a competitive arena of social activity and individual interests that shape and create the place and its objects constantly anew.

### 3.8. Shrine of Bagalāmukhī

The shrine of Bagalāmukhī (Fig. 14) is situated in the southern part of the Kumbheśvara temple compound and additionally houses a wooden statue of Unmatta Bhairava, the malevolent manifestation of Śiva. Bagalāmukhī is a tantric deity and forms part of the Daśamahāvidyās, a group of ten Hindu tantric goddesses that are considered to be forms of Durgā. According to Kinsley (2003:193 ff.) there are three myths concerning the origin of Bagalāmukhī: the first one is said to have happened during the Kṛta Yuga (“golden era”), when a cosmic storm threatened to destroy the universe. Viṣṇu, while lying on the cosmic serpent, felt disturbed and went to a sacred pond called Haridrā (turmeric), where he prayed to Tripurasundarī who appeared and brought Bagalāmukhī with her. The latter calmed the storms with her powers while standing in the pond of the yellow turmeric.<sup>38</sup>

In the second myth a demon called Madan, appears, who won the boon of *vāk siddhi*, which makes everything he says come true. Soon the demon started to kill people with his words and the gods had to worship Bagalāmukhī in order to stop him. The goddess silenced him and later granted his wish to be worshipped hereafter together with her. (Sastri 1951:82) The third myth tells the story of a fight between Śiva and his wife

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<sup>38</sup> Śaktisamgama-tantra, vol 4: Chinnamastā Khanḍa, ed. B. Bhattacharyya and Vrajavallabha Dvivedi (Baroda: Oriental Institute of Baroda, 1978: 6.1-10); see also Acarya Pandita Sri Sivadattamisra Sastri, Bagalāmukhī-rahasyam (1951:81) and Upendra Kumar Das, Bhāratiya Śaktisādhanā, 2 vols. (Santiniketan: Ranjit Rai Prakasan, Visvabharati, 1967:544)

Pārvatī. The goddess was very hungry and repeatedly asked her husband to bring her some food. Śiva told her to be patient, but finally ignored her completely. When Śiva still remained motionless, Pārvatī opened her mouth and swallowed her husband. After some time, smoke started to emerge from her body, symbolising *māyā* (Sk. “the principle of appearance,” “illusion,” “marvellous power of creation,” “mystery”<sup>39</sup>). Then Śiva stepped out of her body and said: “Listen, O Goddess, a woman without a husband, as you just were, is called a widow and must strip herself of the adornments and marks of a married woman. That woman, you, who left her husband by swallowing him, will be known as Bagalāmukhī. And the smoke that came from her will be known as the goddess Dhūmāvatī.”<sup>40</sup> (Kinsley 2003:195)

Some elements drawn from these myths can bring a little light into the practise of Bagalāmukhīs worship within the Kumbheśvara complex. The first myth tells of the goddess’ emergence from a turmeric pond. The yellow powder made out of this plant is popularly used for worship throughout India and Nepal and may explain the association of Bagalāmukhī with the colour yellow and the extensive use of yellow offerings to the goddess in form of cloth, fruits or powder. An epithet of the goddess is Pitāmbarā-devī which means: “she who is dressed in yellow” and in her *pūjāpaddhati*, the manual for conducting the puja, the worshipper is instructed to offer her yellow items, to wear yellow clothes, to sit on a yellow garment and to use turmeric beads for the recitation (Sk. *japa*) of her *mantra*. In her *upāsānapūjā*, the use of yellow is even obliged. (Sastri 1951:15) One of my informants, a devotee of Bagalāmukhī and a practising astrologist, tells me, that Bagalāmukhī is associated with the “yellow” planet Saturn. Like in Babylonia and in many Indo-European languages, the names of the weekdays in Nepal are associated with planets.

David N. Gellner claimed in his essay on Lalitpur (Gellner 1994:164) that Saturday is the day locally dedicated to Bagalāmukhī. In 2010, during the time of fieldwork and thus six years after his book was published, however, the goddess already had two weekdays locally dedicated to her; the first one is Thursday (*bṛhaspativār*), overlooked by Bṛhaspati, a planetary deity associated with Jupiter. A local astrologer explained to me that therefore many people come to worship Bagalāmukhī on Thursdays. It is believed that due to the presence of Bṛhaspati on this day her powers are especially strong. The

<sup>39</sup> Grimes, John. 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Sri Bankhandesvara, *Mahāvidyā Catustayam: Tārā, Dhūmāvatī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Mātaṅgī* (Dattiya, M.P.: Pitambara Pith, n.d.:23)

other day of worship is Saturday (*śanivār*), represented by the Vedic god Śani who denotes the planet Saturn and represents one of the Navagrahas, the nine primary celestial beings in Hindu astrology (*jyotiṣa*).

The second myth, however, stresses her ability to paralyze ones enemies. In Bagalāmukhīs contemporary anthropomorphic depictions, which are popular in and around Lalitpur, she is shown in a yellow dress together with the demon Madan, whose tongue she is about to pull out and crush with her weapon while sitting on the corpse of a dead human body (probably representing a defeated enemy) and resting her right foot on a yellow lotus. This scene indicates a connection with *śava sādhanā*, a spiritual practise where the worshipper uses a corpse to invoke a certain goddess. In the *Tantrasāra*, a goddess called *Karṇa-piśācī* is mentioned who lives in the heart of a corpse. When worshipping her, this goddess comes in an invisible form to the devotee and whispers him every answer he wants into the ear. “Ascending her, getting her power, the *sādhaka* can go anywhere and see the past, present and future.” (Kinsley 2003:205). By invoking the goddess, the aspirant is thought to gain powers, which makes it possible to overcome, defeat or control his enemies. *Karṇa-piśācī* resembles central themes of Shamanism, since a deity is being invoked to give a mystical knowledge, coming from the spiritual world. In Tibetan Buddhism, tantric corps *sādhanā* rites (*chöd* rites) also exist, which literally mean “cutting practise”. They are believed to “cut” through obstacles and obscuration, such as ignorance, anger or self-aggrandisement, depicted in the form of demons.

The reason for connecting Baglāmukhī with Śivas wife is revealed in the third myth that unmasks her as a manifestation of Pārvatī. This makes the Kumbheśvara compound, beside the temple of Paśupatinatha, one of the two main places in Nepal, where Śiva (in his manifestation as “Lord of the pot”) and his wife Pārvatī (manifested as Bagalāmukhī) can be worshipped so close to each other.

In Lalitpur Bagalāmukhī is known as the deity of all beginnings that helps to remove obstacles and is therefore worshipped not only by prospective brides or grooms, but also by businessmen, politicians and students. A local visitor told me about the success he had with his newly developed business idea and assured me that this was only possible, due to Bagalāmukhīs blessings. After asking some more random visitors of Bagalāmukhīs shrine, three main wishes that people ask her to fulfil could be extracted: she is worshipped in order to meet a partner with whom one can commence a relationship or to

strengthen a relationship that already exists. If one plans to open up a business, or to conduct a marriage, many people ask for a blessing by the goddess for this undertaking. Bagalāmukhī is also famous for helping people to achieve victory in court cases as well as for supporting high politicians to call their illegal actions off. All these wishes circle around the idea that Bagalāmukhi is the goddess one has to worship before starting a new undertaking and warding off evil. This may be connected with the belief in Bagalāmukhī's ability of disposing someone's enemies. Visiting the shrine of Bagalāmukhī has become an important practise among many people of the Kumbheśvara neighbourhood and beyond. The belief in the abilities of the shrine has a direct influence on the devotees who come to make a wish, or who ask for her blessing before they start a new undertaking. The reasons why people visit the shrine are manifold.

The next section of the present work will present a few personal stories of visitors to the Kumbheśvara temple compound and ask about their personal experiences at the goddess shrine.

### 3.8.1. Visitors to Bagalāmukhī's shrine and their personal stories



Fig. i.

Lokendra Man Karmacharya, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*"I come here every Thursday. Bagalāmukhī is very popular and within the Hindu religion she is a major goddess. People believe that whatever wish they make to her comes true. I don't come because of that, but every Thursday I think I should go to this temple, so once a week on a Thursday I take a morning walk to the temple to visit the goddess.*

*One time I asked Bagalāmukhī for help. I wanted to fight for a piece of land that belongs to my family and went to the court. My family almost had to leave their home and thus decided to see an astrologist specialised in creating horoscopes (cinā). This astrologist told them to conduct a puja in the early morning before the crows wake up. The astrologist added that if the crows fly away it's not possible anymore to conduct the puja. In Newari we say: ko na hachagao – the crow crossed you. If the crow goes anywhere, this means bad luck, but if you worship Bagalāmukhī before they leave, your wish will be fulfilled. That is our biśwās (belief). That way they came here to do the puja and maybe because of this, or because of another reason they won the case. If you come here and make a wish then almost everything comes true. That's what people believe. You can see it here (pointing to Bagalāmukhīs shrine) there is a big queue!"*



Fig. ii.

Roshan Dangol, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*“I don’t know much about this place. I come sometimes on Thursdays. I am from Swayambhu. Every Thursday there is a crowd of people and I like that. I watch the people and draw them.”*



Fig. iii.

Ram Devi Shrestha, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*“We are from Gokarna, near the Gokarna temple. We come here sometimes, not regularly. My brother went to Switzerland and we have done the fasting (barta) and now start with the final process to wish him good luck. We will light up one hundred thousand candles (lakh batti) to finish our ceremony. The baje (Brahmin) told us to do it. In our culture we should do it, lighting the candles is the final process.”*



Fig. iv.

Luan and Ellin Nakarmi, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*“This place is especially famous for Bagalāmukhī! All the others are sub-gods. If you particularly want to visit Hārītī Mātā, then you can go to her shrine in Swayambhu, if you particularly want to visit Śivaji, you can go to Paśupatinātha. Here Bagalāmukhī is the most famous, all the others are just sub-gods. Bagalāmukhī is famous for law cases. If you have a case and you are not winning it, then you come here and ask for wishes and if the wish comes true, you give lakh batti. We just come to pray over here, simple puja. Sometimes we have a wish and when the wish comes true, we bring offerings. Our mother also came here once because of a law case. A man sued us and demanded the land for himself. So our mother prayed to Bagalāmukhī and then we won the case and could keep our land.”*



Fig. v.

Sabina Shresta, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*“We come here to do dharma (religious duty). We live at Mangal Bazaar (centre of Lalitpur) and came for both Lord Siva and Bagalāmukhī so that Bagalāmukhī fulfils our wishes. One year ago I found him (pointing towards her husband) here and later we married.”*



Fig. vi.

Sandhu Ram Thapa, Lalitpur, August 2010:

*“On Thursdays people come here to worship Bagalāmukhī, just like on Tuesdays they worship Ganeśa. Every god has a particular day, for example, during Janaīpurnimā, people come to see Lord Kumbheśvara, but today is the particular day for Bagalāmukhī. That’s why so many people are here. I’m from Bhaktapur and I come here to worship, to pray. Every Thursday is not possible, but I always come when I have the opportunity. I wish that peace remains in my life and household, I don’t wish anything new. In my life everything is fulfilled, I even have a grandson, everything.”*

## 4. POWER AND INTERACTION. THE EFFICIENCY OF VENERATED OBJECTS

This chapter shall form a bridge into the next topic of concern, which is the individual interaction of the devotee with the stone images of the gods and the role of visual aids during worship. It will start with an excursus into the liturgical practise of the ritual animation of material god-images and then focus on an important element within Hindu worship called *darśana*. This religious act basically means the visual contact between the devotee and the god-image during the puja and forms the basis of Hindu-worship.

Subsequently the daily puja of the main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple will be drafted and his interaction with the god-image will be investigated. In the final chapter of this topic some common criticism both from the part of Hinduism and Christianity, which becomes more pronounced on the topic of image worship, will be outlined.

### 4.1. EXCURSUS: CONSECRATION OF OBJECTS

Each typical Nepali household has an important room, which is used in daily intervals: the puja-room (*pūjā koṭhā*). This area is filled with statues of deities that are present for the domestic worship, usually conducted by women. The statues can be bought at local craft shops, where tourists also find their souvenirs. But there is a difference between the statues that stand in the shop and the ones that stand in the puja-room. In between these two stages, a religious act called *jīvanyāsa* (Sk.) has to be performed, which is a process that activates the capabilities of the object, or rather, that endows the object with “life”. A local Brahmin explains that before a religious image can be “used” it has to be made “alive” by a ritual expert. This procedure shall now be illustrated with a common example concerning the domestic worship of objects as the local scholar Basant Maharjan experienced it during his childhood: While he was at school he got an award for his good achievements, a statue of the Buddha. After he proudly presented the prize to his mother, she proposed him to give it to a priest, who would conduct *jīvanyāsa*. Then, so his mother proposed, they could put the statue into their puja-room to worship it. Basanta Maharjan remembered how much he protested against this idea, because: “After that, the statue doesn’t belong to me anymore, after *jīvanyāsa*, the image is god.”

(Basant 2010)<sup>41</sup> Basanta's story clearly reflects the importance of this process for the holiness of an object. All informants (priests and artists) where telling about this delicate ritual. But what is this process of *jīvanyāsa* exactly?

The notion consists of two Sanskrit words: One is *jīva*, which means "individual soul", "embodied self", or "living entity" which comes from the verb root *jīv*, that can mean "to live", or "living" and the other is *nyāsa*, which can mean "placing", "imprinting", or "purifying". Together they form the word *jīvanyāsa*. In English it therefore literally means: "putting life into something", or "infusing the life of the deity into someone's body". (Grimes 1996:215) The main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple compound explained me that it means, "to put the life of the god into a statue." After this process, so he says, the statue will have the power of a particular god or goddess. "(...) to create a statue and put the power of that god into the statue means, creating the god itself." (Sharma 2010)<sup>42</sup> Before the deity resides in the image, the priest has to invite it to come, by chanting certain *mantras*. Each image has a certain *śloka*, or *mantra*, according to the god or goddess one wishes to venerate. Madan Mohan Mishra, the main priest of the Car Nārāyaṇa Temple on Durbar Square explains that while he chants these *mantras*, he has to be completely purified, bodily and mentally. That is necessary because, so the Brahmin emphasizes, he is having a conversation with god. At the final part of the puja he tells the deity: "You have me and I have you." (Mishra 2010)<sup>43</sup> Then the god is believed to enter the object. From this time on, the image has to be worshipped at regular intervals; otherwise it will lose its power. "If god is there and has power like this, then it's alright. If people don't obey that god, or that image, if it comes to a decrease of respect or if they neglect the image, it will lose power. If I respect you, you will also respect me, if not, our distance will be increased. The same thing happens with the god image. If people don't do all those ritual things, the gods also won't do anything."

(Mishra 2010)<sup>44</sup> According to Mishra that is also why the process is followed by a special puja. The object gets purified and rice and red powder will be sprinkled on it. From now on, the statue "wants" puja every morning. Similarly the British art historian David Freedberg writes about the *ndakó gboyá* mask in Nigeria: "As soon as the image is consecrated, it has at all times, to be properly venerated; insult to the image is insult to

<sup>41</sup> Basant Mahrhan, personal conversation, 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>42</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, personal conversation, 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>43</sup> Madan Mohan Mishra, personal conversation, 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>44</sup> Madan Mohan Mishra, personal conversation, 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

what it embodies, represents or signifies; and terrible punishment is visited on those guilty of such *lèse-majesté*.” (Freedberg 1991: 32) Another important factor connected with the ritual animation of objects are the local artists. I spoke with Tuyoo Pun, a painter from Lalitpur about his work. He explained that he is specialised on painting the final part on Buddhist metal statues- the eyes. When he gets an order from a religious institution, he always has to leave out a part of the eye, usually the pupils, and then give it to the priest in charge. The latter will worship the image and speak the appropriate *mantras*. Only after this step Tuyoo Pun gets the statue back and finishes it. During this time he has to follow strict rules of purification. Even though he works for both Buddhist and Hindus, the orders mainly come from Buddhist institutions. The artist explains that there is no market for the eye opening of Hindu stone sculptures as they do not need it. After he finishes the eyes, however, he covers them with a white cloth and brings the statue to the priest who “opens” them. “Before the eye-opening, this object is just an image, but afterwards, I feel that it is not only an object, but also power. After *jīvanyāsa*, certain divine powers will be kept in the image.” (Pun 2010)<sup>45</sup>

With the consecration ritual a new layer of signification is invoked in the object and the signified ritually becomes the signifier. During the interaction of a person with the god-image, the factor of *semiosis* obviously plays a crucial part. Referring to the anthropology of landscape, religious practise can thus broadly be defined as the interaction of people with materialised potentiality. Differently said, after the process of *jīvanyāsa*, the sign literally becomes the body for the signified. What it normally represents becomes present and gains a certain power. The consecration rite marks a transition of the object, from a manmade, anodyne piece of material, to a venerated, sacredly endowed object. Consequently, people come and worship the image and certain effectiveness proceeds directly from the image. “(...) the image only works because of the fusion of image and prototype (...).” (Freedberg 1991:30)<sup>46</sup> The symbol literally becomes the mount of the meaning. Traces of red powder, rice and other materials used during the puja indicate the devotee that the object has been consecrated and therefore may have the power, to fulfil his or her wishes. These inferential schemata or abductions, which the devotee makes from these “indexical signs”, are often identical with the ones,

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<sup>45</sup> Tuyoo Pun, personal conversation, 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>46</sup> Kris, Ernst / Kurz, Otto. 1995. *Die Legende vom Künstler. Ein geschichtlicher Versuch*. Frankfurt am Main.

that people make from their social other in the form of a person. The indexical sign shows the devotee that the object has been made to “work” and already went through a ritual animation after which the object becomes a living being. The object is thus an index for a certain agency applied on the object. From the point of view of a Brahmin, this is what differentiates a god statue in a shop, from the statue installed within a temple or shrine. Again, after the image is being consecrated, it becomes a “living” object with the capability of causing things to happen, or, in other words, it becomes an agent that takes part in the social activities that happen within the sacred landscape. All the objects discussed in the previous chapter situated within the Kumbheśvara temple compound have been through this process of “animation” and are thus “alive”. This fact is important for its status as sacred space. By visiting Bagalāmukhīs abode, it thus comes to an “art-like” situation, which means “those situations in which the material ‘index’ (the visible, physical ‘thing’) permits a particular cognitive operation that I identify as *the abduction of agency*.” (Gell 1998:13) Because the index triggers a causal inference in the observer, or, an inference about the intentions or capabilities of the counterpart, an agency has been attached to it. Through this process of attached agency, the shrine becomes an agent that literally causes things to happen. Therefore the counterpart does not have to be human in order to conduct a social agency or to initiate an action. It forms a relationship between the devotee, who makes a personal wish and the goddess. The shrine of Bagalāmukhī becomes a manifestation of agency, a mirror or rather a channel of the devotee’s agency, but also of the social context within which the shrine is embedded. Even in its aniconic form, the social power of the *sanctum* emanates, realised through objectification in the causal environment of the devotee.

#### 4.2. *Darśana*

The identification with the god in the image plays an important part for every individual devotee during the worship. The search for the consolidation with the Absolute (Sk. *brahman*) through devotional worship (puja) is nowadays the most popular form of religion in South Asia (Sk. *bhakti*). (Michaels 2006:277) In the Upaniṣads the identification of the individual soul (Sk. *ātman*) with the Absolute became the fundamental doctrine and the merging of the two became the goal in order to reach the status of non-duality. “You can’t see the seer who does the seeing; you can’t hear the

hearer who does the hearing; you can't think of the thinker who does the thinking; and you can't perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving. The self within all is this self of yours. All else besides this is grief!”<sup>47</sup> The devotional aspect during the puja can be seen in the actions and gestures of the subordinate devotee in front of the image. Bowing, kneeling in front of the *sanctum*, presenting offerings, etc. These are all devotional gestures of indignity and affection. The central part of the puja is the reciprocal sight (*darśana*) of the devotee and the deity, a specific kind of blessing received through the eyes. Just like *prāśada*, the sanctified return-gift of the deity, *darśana* is something given by the god or goddess, but also by higher-ranking human beings, such as religious personalities, or important politicians. “Darshan is thus very much of a two-way affair. The gaze directed by the god towards the worshipper confers his blessing; conversely, the devotee reaches out and touches the god. The result is union with the god, a merging of consciousness according to the devotionalist interpretation.” (Gell 1998:117) By conducting this exchange of the gaze, an interpersonal relationship becomes possible between the image and the devotee. According to Alfred Gell the cognitive basis that nevertheless makes this relationship and the animation of an image possible, is dependent on the logic of looking and being seen and not on the belief that the image is actually alive. The author compared the god-image with a mirror, in which the devotee sees him-, or herself seeing the image. The eye contact leads to certain self-awareness due to the cognitive act of looking. The viewer imagines how one appears to the other from the point of view of the viewer. “The net result of the regression whereby devotee's and idol's perspectives become logically interdigitated with one another in this way is a kind of optical oscillation in which idol's and devotee's perspectives shift back and forth with such rapidity that interpersonal boundaries are effaced and ‘union’ is achieved.” (Gell 1998:120)

The contact between the devotee and the god-image thus happens through the eyes with which the devotee literally “touches” the statue. In Sanskrit words for “seeing” have within their semantic field also the word “knowing”. (Eck 1996:9) The centrality of the gaze during image-worship probably stems from a mixture of folk religious conceptions of the “evil eye” and the general experience that appearance is truth. When death occurs, or a disease, or any other negative incidents, it is often believed that one did not perform enough *darśana* to the spirits or to certain deities and was thus hit by malevolent spirits

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<sup>47</sup> Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.5.1

or the “evil eye”.

What is remarkable, however, is that in the case of *darśana* the image is believed to actually look back at its perceiver, which points towards a different understanding of artefacts. This insight forms the basis for Alfred Gell’s theory of art, because it demonstrates that artefacts are differently perceived in other cultural contexts. For an anthropological theory of art, it is therefore important to move away from the western understanding of art objects, which regards them as controlled by their maker. It is important to keep distance from the concept of aesthetics, because it cannot be used in a universal sense. In lieu thereof the author proposes to move towards a new area of interpretation. It is the area where things are merging with people due to the existence of relationships between objects and persons. Within it an object can be theoretically understood as a “social other” that has the power to act upon its beholder. The art historian Horst Bredekamp similarly argues that artefacts have certain autonomy and that this sentiment pervades all cultural contexts. Even though objects are artificial, they possess an independent existence or an immanent *enárgeia*, which allows us to understand them as social agents in the vicinity of human actors. Bredekamp calls it the “intrinsic image-act”, which operates through the *potentia* of the form. When looking at the god-image, it comes to a “*chiasmus*” of the worshippers and the artefacts gaze. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century this sentiment was strongly connected with the following question: How does the Creator himself perceive the world he created? Within this temporal context, the German Philosopher, theologian and mathematician Nicolaus Cusanus developed his ideas about autonomous image-activity<sup>48</sup>. He reasoned that an image is indeed made through human hands, but only fulfils its assignation when it confronts the spectator with its own *potentia*. This can be achieved by those images, which do not resemble too much its respective prototypes. Only when they incorporate certain differentiation they form a transcendental emanation of endless possibilities. In every form, Cusanus concluded, a subjunctive has to appear, which refers to the divine infinity. The skill of the artist is thus the motor of the image-activity. Similarly the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>49</sup> argues much later in his treatise about the “*chiasmus of the gazes*” that seeing is a form of touching and deduces the converse argument that a thing, which can be seen, looks back through its tactile resistance. (Bredekamp 2010:239-243)

<sup>48</sup> Cusanus, Nicolaus. 1987. *Vom Sehen Gottes. Ein Buch mystischer Betrachtung*. Zürich.  
1995. *Der Laie über den Geist*. Hamburg.

<sup>49</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 2001. *Le visible et l'invisible suivie de Notes de travail*. Paris.

Within the southasian context the notion of *darśana* has later also been used to describe the philosophical systems (“accurate seeing”), because the eye was considered as the custodian of the truth<sup>50</sup>. But these scriptures also contain a great number of critical texts concerning image-worship. As will be shown in chapter 4.4, the discussion about the “liveliness” of artefacts entails an ambivalent view on image-worship. According to the critics, god is without concrete qualities and amorphous. The visual world is thus only illusiveness (Sk. *māyā*), camouflage and blinding. Real understanding does not need the gaze, but awareness and inner sight. (Michaels 2006:257)

#### 4.3. The daily puja of the Sarveśvara linga

The act of puja may shortly be defined as an offering ritual to the established god images by invoking the deity, presenting certain offerings, then ritually dismissing it and finally receiving *prasāda*, the materialised favour of the gods. The etymology of the word puja still remains uncertain. It may have derived from the Tamil word “*pūcu*” (“to besmear”), but already in the Vedic texts the verb “*pūj*” in terms of “venerating” is being mentioned. (Michaels 2006:265,266) Puja rites originally belonged to the category of group religious activity, but in later times became a more individual act for the purpose of each persons’ own, spiritual well-being. People may go to the temple and request the priest to perform puja rites, or they may do it by themselves, at home, in a sacred institution, or even on a random street corner that is marked as a holy place. (Deodhar, Hino, Tachikawa 2001:v) It seems, as if the puja rite can be performed nearly everywhere, as long as a certain material counterpart is being involved. In order to take a closer look at the relationship of people to the venerated materialistic counterparts, an interview with Madhav Shyam Sharma, the main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple compound was conducted, in order to learn about his daily treatment of the central *sanctum* of the Kumbheśvara temple.

Depending on whether it is a common day or a day of festivities, so Madhav Shyam Sharma explains, he performs two different pujas in the main temple of the Kumbheśvara complex: first the *nitya* puja, which he conducts every day and secondly, the *naimatya* puja, which happens only on special occasions. The *nitya* puja is conducted every morning and consists of four parts. The opening celebration is called *samkalpa*, and resembles a vow to all the heavenly beings, for peace and betterment. According to

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<sup>50</sup> Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 5.15.5

western descriptions it means taking a formal decision to conduct a puja. After this formal decision has been made, Sharma begins the *guru* puja, the worship of the latter's teacher or *guru*. Then it is the turn of the *nyāsa* puja, which involves yogic practise and meditation. Finally, the *ātman* puja, the worship of the soul is being performed. Once Sharma completed these four parts, his soul is purified, and he can proceed to invite the five river goddesses to participate in the puja: Gāṅga, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Narmadā and Kāverī. By inviting these goddesses, he purifies the water, with which he is then going to clean or wash the linga, or rather, in which he will bathe the linga (*snāna*). Then he pours milk, yoghurt, purified butter, honey and *sacha*, a special kind of sugar over it. This process, so he said, is called *pāñcamṛitsnān*, which probably means “washing with five substances”. Then he presents the gifts he is offering (*upacāra*): sandalwood (*candana*), crimson, or vermillion powder (*sindoor*), red vermillion powder (*abir*), barley, rice, thread (*janai*), clothes, flowers, garlands, leaves of apricot, incense, sweets and fruits. This is a list of regular offerings that people can give to any object of veneration. If somebody asks the priest to perform a puja, they will have to organise at least half of these offerings. After this, he recites a *mantra* to invite the god to come into the image and then recites a hymn (*strota*) to praise him. Thereupon, a “special edition of the *rudrī* puja” takes place, which is a combination from all four Vedas and with which he calls Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa and Sūrya and five other gods who represent the elements: *prthvī* (Sk. earth), *jala* (Sk. water), *vāyu* (Sk. wind), *ākāśa* (Sk. space) and *agni* (Sk. fire). The next step is the process of the *pañcamukhī* puja, the puja of the five faces. The priest puts a metal plate with the five faces of Śiva over the stone linga after invoking the female consort of Śiva in the form of Śakti. Then the linga is decorated with flowers, called *śrīgāra*. Finally oil and butter lamps are offered, which indicates the ending of the puja (*ārati*) and the priest starts to give blessings and distributes all the ritually deployed offerings to the people as *prasāda*. Because the puja is elaborate and time-consuming, the evening puja consists only of *samkalpa*, *nyās* puja, *strota* and *ārati*, the offering of oil and butter lamps.

In the first part of the puja, Sharma has to ritually identify himself with the god he is evocating, and simultaneously, as he explains, has to turn into the god as well, because only Śiva himself is allowed to worship Śiva, as it is written in the Śaivāgama-texts. (Michaels 2006:268) By this process, the priest literally engages with the deity, by transforming himself into the latter and inviting him, to come into the manmade statue

every morning. The abstract form of Śiva therefore does not point to a transcendental being, but is the being itself, or more precisely, the stone linga embodies the deity during its presence. Because of this, people that are close to the object have to behave in a certain way since they reside in the presence of the god. The priest who spends most of his time close to the object has to follow strict rules, which constrict his live-style in a remarkable way. He keeps a record where he notes what he did, and what he still has to do in order to maintain within the rules. The most important thing is to be purified (*sāttvika*) whenever he is in contact with the statue. For this it is necessary to fast. Only with an empty stomach, he can approach the statue and perform the puja. Once he had tea or ate something, he cannot touch it anymore. Also the people who come to do the worship have to maintain within the rule system and are not allowed to enter the main part of the shrine, since most of them have already eaten or wear leather goods and are therefore impure. They are also not allowed to touch the priest, as any bodily contact carries the risk of becoming impure. Sharma wears a special dress that he has to change every morning and purify with water and within his family house he has to cook on a separate stove reserved for him alone. If he does not follow all these rules, Sharma explains, there will be consequences. After being asked, what kind of consequences that could be, he answers while pointing to his teacup: "This is tea and it is hot. Knowing that, if you touch or swallow it without patience, in another way as you are supposed to, then you will get hurt. God is the same." (Sharma 2010)<sup>51</sup> In other words: If any mistake is happening during the ritual, it will have consequences for everybody involved.

The statue of a deity is an artifactual body that incorporates the life of the god. The god-image is believed to incorporate the specific god or goddess it depicts. Therefore the devotees have to treat the god-image in a specifically careful way. These images can be either iconic and resemble the prototype (with prototype the body and "self" of the deity is meant, whose "resemblance" is mediated by the artist) or aniconic statues, such as natural stones or the "naturally generated" *sivalinga* within the Kumbheśvara temple. Both versions serve as an index for the spatiotemporal presence of the deity. They are equally realistic, because the form of the image is the visual form of the deity (Sk. *mūrti*). These images allow a physical interaction between humans and gods. Despite other opinions the interaction with images cannot be described as symbolic. "We can only

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<sup>51</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, personal conversation, 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

distinguish between idolatrous and non-idolatrous use of religious images because idolatry is an important sense not ‘symbolic’ at all, whereas the use of images as aids to piety, rather than physical vehicles of divinity, is symbolic.” (Gell 1998:135) “Idolatric” practices are thus real, practical services for the divine social other, in image-form.

Offerings such as fruits or sweets for example, demonstrate an act of feeding the god. The meaning of this act does not lie in the symbolical act of putting food in front of the deity, but in the real (causal) outcome of the act: “(...) the god was no longer hungry.” (Gell 1998:135) Throughout the whole divine service the god image is treated as a living being that needs to be fed, washed, garlanded, etc. Standing in front of the god image therefore means standing in the presence of a deity, where a certain hierarchy is automatically imposed on the devotee. Through the act of puja, however, the barriers between the human and the divine can be dissolved. A certain hierarchy is elided through the process of identification with the deity, or with the image of the deity, through which the human devotee becomes “divine” as well. This is being symbolised materially by the distribution of *prasāda*, the return gift of the now sanctified offerings (flowers, fruits, sweets, etc.) of the divine being. When the return gift is a fruit or a sweet, the devotee literally eats a part of the highest substance and shares its food with the deity that “ate” from it before. It can also consist of sanctified flowers, which the specific god or goddess “enjoys” and then returns to the devotee. In order to make this exchange possible, however, all hierarchical barriers need to be gone, since otherwise it would not be possible for the devotee to share their food with a divine being. Just as there cannot be any status difference between the god and the devotee, also in the classification of the cast-system, everybody has to be equal, or has to have equal access to the *prasāda*. This may be one explanation of the actual popularity of the puja-act. (Michaels 2006:270)

Practically, however, there definitely exists a hierarchical barrier between the Brahmin priest who places himself closer to god than the rest of the devotees, who thus remain always dependent on him. It is exactly this situation, which gives the priest his power, as long as the cult is still active. Sharmas example of the hot teacup reflects a strong respect towards the image and since the main priest is the only one allowed to touch it, all the other devotees turn into some sort of applicants, who are completely dependent not only on the benevolence of the god, but also of the priest. Sharma explains me clearly that he conducts the puja, so that the god remains within the image and therefore keeps a certain potential alive. In this form, the image cuts into the life of all the worshippers by lending

some of its potential, by granting wishes, giving hope and audacity. Because the image is god, everything becomes possible, as long as the object remains embedded within certain religious practise, which can only be conducted by Madhav Sharma and his descendants. Here a strong connection between the power of the god-image with the power of the priest can be discovered. As the representative of the deity, the priest has the power to manipulate the meaning of the image.

#### 4.4. Interaction with an image; criticism and ambiguity

In countries where Hinduism and Buddhism are the dominant religions, materiality is considered superficial and as something that people should overcome. It is believed that the truth lies beyond the physical world. The critic of materialism forms the basis of those two religions. In Hinduism for example, it is represented by the concept of *maya*, according to which the material world is mere illusion. (Miller 2005:1) In the *Jabala Upaniṣad* is written that form is only a superimposition, but not reality. Yogis should see Śiva in their souls; images are therefore made for the imagination of the ignorant. (Eck 1996:45)<sup>52</sup> Beside all the material there is always an abstract feeling or thought. “For when there is a duality of some kind, then the one can see the other, the one can smell the other, the one can taste the other, the one can greet the other, the one can hear the other, the one can think of the other, the one can touch the other, and the one can perceive the other. When, however, the Whole has become one’s very self (*ātman*), then who is there for one to see and by what means? (...) About this self (*ātman*) one can only say ‘not----, not----. ‘ He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. (...) Look- by what means can one perceive the perceiver?”<sup>53</sup> (Olivelle 2008:71) The “not this and not that” rejects all kinds of representation. Paradoxically, this is and has always been expressed by materialistic means, visible material has always been used to show the invisible. Also during worship it seems as if the existence of a materialistic counterpart is indispensable.

Also in the western world “Idolatry” has always been viewed with ambiguity. The very fact that an image, it does not matter if iconic or an-iconic, can give a body to a deity, or rather, that it is possible to endow an object with holy powers, has been watched with sceptical eyes in the western religious history. The antagonism towards the

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<sup>52</sup> *Jābāladarśana Upaniṣad* 3.59.

<sup>53</sup> *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.5.15

treatment of sacred images has its source already in the Hebrew bible that says:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” (Mose. Exodus 20. 4-6)<sup>54</sup>.

This commandment was against the imagery of the transcendental, but it was not powerful enough to stop the human urge for depiction. For Christian apologists the function of religious imagery was clear: they are communicating the word of god to the illiterate and serve as a reminder of the suffering of Jesus Christ. Whether it is easier or not to show empathetic emotions while looking at an image, would have gone too far already, since this would imply identification with the image. And this is exactly what is happening during the normal day-to-day puja of Madhav Shyam Sharma, or differently said, this is what is necessary. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz emphasize, that every human being tends to equalize images with their respective prototypes. They postulate that this is especially the case in “primitive” societies, while in the western society, this tendency mostly occurs among “lunatics”, among people in “emotionally overloaded” situations, or among children in general (Kris, Kurz 1995:105). This differentiation of the self-proclaimed “higher civilisation” from the “primitive” image-worshippers has of course always been an artificial way of setting oneself apart by keeping the “others” down. „How convenient this relegation of behaviour to primitives, to neurotics and psychotics, to crowds and children. Kris and Kurz perfectly exemplify the reluctance to admit to ,our level of civilisation’ a propensity which they themselves identify; and this reluctance - and fear- remains one of the greatest obstacles to the proper analysis of response.“ (Freedberg 2004:201-202) With the analysis of response Freedberg means studying the behaviour of humans in front of images. What are people doing with them? And what are the images doing with people? Freedberg emphasizes that the performance of image-worship also happened or still happens in the Christian world and can be studied throughout our history. An example would be the standard element of a Roman ceremony:

“Almighty and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to bless and sanctify this painting (or

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<sup>54</sup> <http://lds.org/scriptures/ot/ex/20.2-3?lang=eng#1> (14<sup>th</sup> of March 2011)

sculpture) in memory and honour of our only born son Jesus Christ (or the Virgin or the Apostles or the Martyr or the Saint, as the case may be) and grant that whosoever shall venerate and honour your only begotten Son (or Blessed Virgin, etc.) may by his merits and intercession obtain from thee grace in this life and eternal glory in the life to come.

Then the bishop sprinkles the image with holy water.” (Freedberg 1991:89)

Even though the text does not make clear what is actually happening with the object, there are two important statements in it: It is only possible to venerate the image after the consecration, before that, it is an image with no powers. The image serves as a channel to obtain blessings from the almighty god and therefore implements a certain act. So here we have two clues about the power of an image after its consecration rite, or rather about certain “techniques” to make an image “work”.

Throughout the world, the power of images has always been a subject of severe ambiguity and interest, but also the question at what point something starts to actually be an image remains contested. But what does it mean that the counterpart in fact is an image? “... everything we are and do arises out of the reflection upon ourselves given by the mirror image of the process by which we create form and are created by the same process.” (Hegel 1977 In: Miller 2005:8). This quote may lift us high above the given example, but serves as a step out of this specific place and allows a short glance into a broader viewpoint. We are confronted with the material world that we ourselves created and that through us gets recreated again. This circular process, according to Hegel, makes way for the process of *objectification* after which our very own creations become alien to us, or rather, become a person-like counterpart. By “letting the image go” and accepting it as an independent actor, we let the image affect our lives and actions. This is especially apparent in the religiously motivated act of image-worship as we have just discussed above. Still, it is not clear how these images, after they have been released into independence, finally receive the power to actually make its audience do what they want. Until now, art historians and anthropologists have isolated two elements, which endow religious imagery with power. On the one hand, due to certain consecration ceremonies, which endow them with significant occult characteristics, but also due to the force of *mimesis*, which connects them with the deities they represent. As an anthropologist who focuses on social relations, Gell has to add the additional factor of representing a deity through a human actor such as the priest. In the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, it is the priest who uses the words of Jesus Christ and presents the wine and

the bread in his place. Or during the daily puja of Madhav Shyam Sharma as will be described above, the main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple has to turn himself into the god, in order to worship him correctly. In that case, the “Index” of the deity is not a carved image, but a human being. (Gell 1998:150) The religious image thus gets its power not by a certain resemblance with the god or goddess it represents, but through the agency of an actor in his immediate presence.

## 5. THE SHIFTING OF POWER WITHIN THE KUMBHEŚVARA TEMPLE COMPOUND

### 5.1. *Sanctum* of the main temple and its plurality of meanings

In the centre of the *sanctum sanctorum*, fixed by a metal attachment, stands a rather tilted simple stone linga (Fig. 35), which is locally known as Sarveśvara (“Lord of All”). Additionally, hidden under a pile of religious paraphernalia, a second stone linga with four faces can be found in the northeastern corner of the *cella* (Fig. 36). The latter is consecrated to Śiva in his manifestation as Kumbheśvara, after whom the temple is named.

Sarveśvara is recognised in many different ways, for example as Mṛtyumjaya, the victor of Death. Therefore the belief is widespread that by praying to Mahādeva, the god will maintain a longer life for the devotee. In the centre of the legend is a sage (*rṣi*), whose life is destined to endure not more than twelve years. In the last year, Yamarāja, the Lord of Death came to take his soul, but the sage refused and held on the *śivalinga* for help. When Yamarāja threw his chain to catch him, it touched a part of the linga and Śiva appeared to challenge him by preventing Death to take the *rṣi* with him. Śiva won the battle and the sage remained to live on forever. (Sharma 2010)<sup>55</sup> This story indicates Śivas power of defeating the actuator of death and thus, whenever a dead body passes the temple compound in order to go down to the Bagmati river, where the appropriate cremation ceremonies are conducted, the windows of the Kumbheśvara temple are being closed by the *deopālas*. If they would remain open, so the local belief, Mahādeva in his form as Mṛtyumjaya would bring the body back into the living world. From the point of

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<sup>55</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, personal communication, 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

view of some Newar Buddhists visiting the temple, the linga represents the Bodhisattva Vajrapāni, while for others it is no obstacle to worship the linga as Sarveśvara and having a Buddhist family priest. Who worships which god or goddess is overlapping and always in a flux.

For eleven months of the year the Sarveśvara linga of the main temple is covered after each morning puja by a gilt copper sheath, showing four faces of Śiva (Fig. 37). In the month before Janaipūrṇimā, the annual full-moon festival that, among other things, obliges high-caste Hindu men to change their brahmanical cord (*janai*), the sheath is replaced by another one, whose shape is formed by a gilded metal serpent coiled up in a spiral in the form of a linga (Fig. 23). Finally, the fifth object within the *cella* has been donated only recently by a Newar devotee from the neighbourhood, a silver metal *nāga*, which can be placed over the linga (Fig. 35).

The linga in the centre of the Kumbheśvara temple has thus a plurality of meanings attached to it that are connected with different groups of people that have different viewpoints and socio-religious backgrounds. The *sanctum* can therefore be identified as an index, which points towards a multeity as opposed to being part of a calculation or a set of tautologies. Due to the indexical nature of the object, a plurality like this becomes possible. The *sanctum* as an index depends on a different kind of inference or cognitive operation that Gell, borrowing from the field of semiotics, calls abduction. This is an inference that is independent of demonstration, because it is based on proving the antecedent with the consequence. (Boyer 1994:147) An object therefore “naturally” incorporates a certain liberty, which turns it into a neutral platform on which a variety of meanings can be created by marking it as a sign from which a variety of abductions can be made.

The main object of the cult within the Kumbheśvara temple is the Sarveśvara linga, indicated already by its central position. The orally transmitted legend, as told by the main priest, stresses its status as a self-generated sanctum, while the other linga, dedicated to Lord Kumbheśvara, has been installed by a mythical sage called Agastya, or Kumbhaṛṣi, the sage of the water pot. Here the two different origins of the lingas are interesting to note; the Kumbheśvara linga is being traced back directly to its cause, personified by the sage Agastya, while the linga, now situated in the centre of the temple, emanated by itself. The canal leading to its origin has thus been blocked. As no human

hand was used in its creation, the object is regarded as especially precious and pure. Mahdav Shyam Sharma explains me the legendary origins as follows: Rāma, the hero of the famous Epos Rāmayana, murdered the mythical demon king Rāvaṇa. The latter is considered to be a Brahman and thus Rāma is accused for conducting a *brahmahatyā*, the killing of a Brahman. In order to express his sorrow and free himself from his burden, Rāma invited the sages (*r̄ṣis*) to his place. All of them followed his invitation, except for Agastya, who remained in his residence (*āśrama*) in order to be able to continue his worship of the Sarveśvara linga. The latter was then already situated in the present temple area, which used to be a big forest called Aranya Lalitā. So Rāma went there to visit Agastya in order to find out why he refused to come. The sage told him that he would only join the other *r̄ṣis*, after Rāma visited all the sacred places (*tīrthas*) of the local deities. By making a pond for Gaurī (*gaurīkunḍa*) and thus inviting all the gods and goddesses of the area, Rāma fulfilled Agastyas demand and the sage left his residence to join the meeting. When Agastyas returned to his residence, however, he realised, that the whole area was flooded and that he therefore could not find the Sarveśvara linga anymore. Because he needed an object to pray, he called the *śivaliṅga* in a vessel (*kalaśa*) for several days and slowly the water flew out of the compound and into the Bagmati river where the Mrtyumjaya Ghat is now situated. After all the water was gone, Agastya discovered a linga inside the vessel and, located just nearby, subsequently also found the Sarveśvara linga. This is the reason why there are two lingas beside each other within the temple. (Sharma 2010)<sup>56</sup>

A passage of a stone inscription dated NS 512 (1392 AD) confirms Sharmas legend, by mentioning Agastya as precursor of the establishment of the Kumbheśvara temple and fabricating a strong connection between Kumbheśvara Śiva, Śiva as the Lord of the pot and Kumbhaṛṣi Agastya, the *r̄ṣi* of the pot. It says: “Since the great Lord (Śiva) was favourably disposed by the austerities performed by Kumbhaṛṣi in that sacred place, the temple is called Kumbheśvara.” (Radcliffe-Bolon 1991:88) Another inscription from the time of King Jayasthiti Malla (1382-1394) close to the water tank, tells about a man called Jayabhima who promised to build a temple for Kumbheśvara if the latter releases his wife from her fever through his praying. Just like in the legend of Lalit, who miraculously got healed through the water coming from the spring of this place, Jayabhimas wish refers to the medical knowledge of Agastya, who was famous for being

<sup>56</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

a good physician. In the Himavat Khaṇḍa of the Nepāla Māhātmya of the Skanda Purāṇa it says, that Agastya came to the temple, in order to identify the holy *tīrthas* and to perform puja for Śiva as Paśupati. He is also reported to have chosen the location of the installation of the linga and of digging a hole where the water continuously flowed and where he placed the *sanctum*. (Radcliffe-Bolon 1991:89) This legendary site is very likely to be the interior pond of the Kumbheśvara temple compound (Fig. 21).

The *pūrṇa kalaśa* in which Agastya invoked Kumbheśvara, manifested as a linga, is an abundant symbol of divinity. In the beginning it served as a representation of the Buddha, but later became a symbol for the mother goddesses. The water-filled *kalaśa* can also act as a temporary dwelling place of gods; for instance, when the deity's image has to be repainted or repaired (before a festival or when damaged) the essence or the Self (*ātman*) of the deity is transferred into such a *kalaśa* to transport it. In some cases, however, this vessel served as a womb that gave birth to mythical characters such as the sage Agastya, the Vedic god of the waters Varuṇa (Agastya's father), and Śiva as Lord of the water pot as was drafted above. (Slusser 1982:352) Because of their particular origin, they got similar epithets like Kumbhayoni, Kumbhajanman, Kumbhodbhavan, Kumbhabhū, or Kumbhasambhava; all of these basically mean "pot-born". (Radcliffe-Bolon 1991:76) In the Skanda Purāṇa, the Matsyapurāṇa, as well as in the Ṛg Veda (VII.33, II), Agastya was born out of a water pot. Since in the Skanda Purāṇa (Jha 1901, p. 104), as well as in Madhav Sharmas recounted legend mentioned above, Agastya plays an important role in the establishment of Śiva as Kumbheśvara, it seems very likely, that the idea of Kumbheśvara derived from that of Agastya as *kumbhayoni*. In chapter LXI of the Matsyapurāṇa, Śiva tells the story of a crowd of demons who terrorised the earth and were hunted down with fire and wind at the command of Puruhūta (Indra). Because five demons (Tārakāsura, Kamalākṣa, Kāladanṣṭra, Parāvasu and Virochāna) fled into the ocean to be safe from the fire, the terror went on, as the demons crawled out of the water during the night and persecuted the gods, goddesses and all living beings. As a result, Indra ordered Agni and Vāyu (fire and wind) to dry up the ocean and kill everything it inhabits. The two latter, however, refused, as they felt pity with all the innocent creatures that inhabit the ocean. This triggered a rage in Indra who then said: "There is no question of *dharma* or *adharma* where immortals are concerned, and your glory is still more high. O Agni and Vāyu! Since you have violated my injunction and have adopted the duties of the Munis not to injure any being, and since you have leaned towards the enemies who

are devoid of religion and politics, losing sight of duty and Śāstra; therefore You, O fire, will now be born by assuming one body along with Maruta among the mortals, in the form of a sage. In that form of the sage Agastya, you will dry up the ocean, after which you will again come back to your Divine form.” Immediately after this annunciation, the two gods fell down on earth where Agastya’s creation took place as follows: To become the head of the Apsaras, Viṣṇu created a beautiful woman out of his thigh and called her Urvaśī. The gods Mitra and Varuṇa both competed to win her favour and when the nymph accepted Mitra and granted Varuṇa to dwell in her presence at the same time, the god of honesty (Mitra) called her a courtesan and cursed her. Subsequently both Varuṇa and Mitra threw their seed into a pitcher of water, out of which the two sages Agastya and Vasiṣṭha were born. “Vasiṣṭha, similarly, entered the pitcher of water and was born out of it, and after him, the sage Agastya was born, of the same pitcher, of white colour, with four hands, sacred thread, *kamandalu* (‘waterpot’), and garland.” (Taluqdar of Oudh 1980:186 et seq.) After he collected enough power in the course of austerities in the Malaya Mountain, Agastya drank up the entire ocean, and the demons could be killed. In the Māhabhārata the demons are called Kāleyas and were killed by a thunderbolt made out of the bones of the sage Dadhīca after Agastya discovered the hideout of the demons. The Devas later asked Agastya to disgorge the water again, but the sage had already digested it. (Schaufelberger 2004:426-430)

The repeated theme of exsiccation, or rather, the controlling of water is striking and may point to a Sanskritization or to the adoption of an old water-, or *nāga*-cult. Both of the recounted stories are about eliminating a body of water, which plays a crucial part in the history of origin of the Kathmandu Valley: According to Nepalese mythology, the Kathmandu Valley used to be filled a lake with nine chief *nāgas* abiding in it. They inhabited a lake called Kālīhrada (Kālīs lake), or Nāgavāsa, the dwelling place of the serpents, together with their cortege. When Manjushri (or in the Hindu-version, Viṣṇu/Kriṣṇa) drained this lake by hitting his sword into the ground, the snakes glided away together with the water. The king of the snakes, Kārkotaka and his queen Kālīnāginī moved together with their followers into a pool called Taudah and reigned from there in an underwater palace thereafter. The rest of the returned *nāgas*, such as the chiefs Vāsuki and Tākṣaka all came to reign over different *tīrthas* located near rivers. (Slusser 1982:353) The coming and going of the waters seem to reflect the indeterminacy of the monsoon seasons. Draughts regularly hit the Kathmandu Valley until today and

endanger the rice crops. Naturally, the disruptions of rain were a disaster for its inhabitants and often led to severe famines. Through the worship of the *nāgas*, the personification, materialization and controllers of the rain, the people of the Kathmandu Valley hoped to influence the sacred and life-giving substance. The abandoned statue of the serpent deity *Vāsuki* within the Kumbheśvara temple compound, which is mentioned in chapter 3.6, points to the former existence of such a cult surrounding the interior water pond. It is very likely that *Vāsuki* once presided over the inner water *tīrtha*, before it was taken over by Śiva in his form as Kumbheśvara. The story of Kumbheśvara emerged out of the history of origin of the sage Agastya and covers the cults association with the worship of the *nāgas*, a clear example of Sanskritization and the veiling of indigenous cults. The snake cover in the form of a *śivaliṅga*, which is nowadays used for the ceremony during the Kumbheśvara *melā*, perfectly materialises the camouflage (Fig. 23).

## 5.2. Festivals, ceremonies and the cycle of the year

The irregularity of rains led to a large assortment of festivals that reflect the cycle of the year. In this chapter a short introduction into some communal festivities that play a major role for the inhabitants of Lalitpur will be provided in order to demonstrate their conceptual bond. The festival cycle starts in the Nepalese month of Vaiśākh (April/May) with the New Year celebrations, where a huge linga ceremonial pole is erected and carried through the city. The linga represents the power of Śiva as Lord Bhairava and is a symbol of the victory of the New Year. (Anderson 2005:45) Shortly afterwards in the month of Jyeṣṭh (May/June), the important festival of *rato Matsyendranātha* takes place in Lalitpur. The cult surrounding the red-faced deity evolved out of a legendary twelve-year drought, which is said to have once hit the Kathmandu Valley. The Nepalese chronicles (*Vamśāvalī*) recount that Gorakhanātha, a disciple of Matsyendranātha (or Avalokiteśvara from the Buddhist point of view) imprisoned all nine rain-giving serpents under a hill near the temple of Paśupatinath. To prevent them from escaping he remained seated on the hilltop in order to punish the people of the Valley who did not pay him due respect. The priestly adviser of the king knew that only Matsyendranātha himself was able to save the Valley from its downfall. So the king of Bhadgaon (Bhaktapur) set out together with a learned man from Kathmandu and a Jyapu-porter from Lalitpur to fetch the god. When Matsyendranātha arrived in the Valley, Gorakhanātha had to rise in order

to bow before his teacher and the serpents quickly escaped from their prison.

Subsequently they brought torrents of rain, which fell on the desiccated land and saved the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. (Slusser 1982:370-371) In remembrance of this legend, an annual Matsyendranātha *jātrā* takes place both in Lalitpur and Bungamati, a village about seven Kilometres south of Lalitpur. Matsyendranātha is known as the patron deity of the Valley, the god of harvest and prosperity and celebrated as the liberator of serpents and thus the bringer of rain. The month of Śrāvāna takes place in July/August and marks the monsoon season. It is during this month that another rain-related festival called the Serpent's Fifth (Nāgapancamī) takes place, dedicated to the snakes in order to maintain the rainfall during the rice-planting season. Every house honours the serpent deities on this day by displaying images of *nāgas* on top of their doorways and worships them in order to maintain a peaceful relationship (Fig. 38).

Shortly after Nāgapancamī the festival of Janaipūrṇimā takes place, the ritual procession of Kumbheśvara in Lalitpur as well as Gunhu Puni, a festival of the Newar Jyapu communities who follow the tradition of donating a plate of rice to the frogs on their fields to accord their honour to the amphibians. Just as serpents, frogs are perceived as purveyors of rain and have to be venerated to maintain their favour. The Kumbheśvara *jātra* and Gunhu Puni are both highly agrarian festivals and rooted in the worship of serpents as the ultimate conveyors of water. (Slusser 1982:356) These two festivals will be explained more detailed in the next chapter.

To honour the dead the Gai *jātrā* takes place, which also leads through the Kumbheśvara temple. A few days later Krishna's birthday is celebrated and in the same month, the three-day festival of Tīj animates the Kumbheśvara temple compound once again. Hundreds of woman dressed in red Saris gather within the compound in order to worship Śiva and wish for a happy marriage, good fortune and a long life for their husbands. During the time of Tīj fasting is compulsory for married Hindu woman as well as for young girls who reached puberty. They remember the dedicated fasting of Pārvatī, who continued and prayed until Śiva finally became her husband. (Anderson 2005:117) Shortly afterwards the Gaṇeśa *jātrā* is taking place, which marks the legend of Gaṇeśa's defamation through Candrama, the goddess of the moon. The legend recounts how Candrama criticised Brahma, the god of creation, because he worshipped a deformed minor demi-god such as Gaṇeśa. The elephant-headed god was furious and pronounced a curse over the moon-god, which condemned every person who dared to look at the moon

to become a thief. The moon deity thus had to hide and people started to become miserable, but finally Lord Brahma managed to convince Gaṇeśa to reduce the curse only to one day of the year. Thus on the festival day of the Gaṇeśa *jātrā*, people remain enclosed in their houses during the night in order to avoid the sight of the moon.

(Anderson 2005:123-124) One of the most important festivals is Dasai or Durgā puja, which lasts for around two weeks. The festival glorifies the ultimate victory of virtue over evil forces, or rather the victory of the gods over demons and devils that threaten the human population. The festival marks the end of the rainy season and of the rice harvest. (Toffin 2008:317-318) After the Bhairava and Indra *jātrā* and the Tihār festival of lights in the month of Kārttik four days before the full moon, Haribodhinī *ekādāśī* is celebrated. It marks the awakening of Viṣṇu from his four-month rest on the back of the symbolic cosmic serpent Śeṣa. With this awakening the rain season has officially ended and Viṣṇu returns to protect the population. (Slusser 1982:255-256) In the same month, the goddess Mahalaxmi, goddess of wealth and harvest is honoured and worshiped to ensure the protection of the harvest. In the month of Mārga, which takes place around November/December, a big feast is organised to show their gratitude to the gods for the annual harvest. Yomarhi Puni, or Dhanyapūrṇimā as it is called, probably originates from Newari farmers, but is nowadays practiced by every Nepalese household by giving food offerings to the gods.

The festivals of the Kathmandu Valley are all connected with one another and form part of a larger circle, which is believed to ensure the steady course of the seasons. In Lalitpur the Gai- *jātrā*, Matya puja, the Krṣṇa *jātrā*, the Bhīmsen puja and the Narsimha *jātrā* also lead through the Kumbheśvara temple compound. The circumventions are organised after 24 platforms, which are distributed throughout the city. The procession path is either followed only by the inhabitants or together with a god-image carried within a large ark. The use of these processions is to connect the geographically distributed *tīrthas* with one another and to define the sacred field.

### 5.3. Kumbheśvara Melā

As should now have become apparent, in the Nepalese, as well as in the Indian cosmology, water is worshipped as a divine and life-giving substance. This is especially obvious in Nepal, when looking at the vast number of *tīrthas* that are mostly located near

rivers or water pools. A pilgrimage to these places and taking a bath in its waters is the most important religious activity of every Nepalese citizen. One of these *tīrthas* is the interior pond of the Kumbheśvara temple compound, which is invoked in regular intervals during the so-called Kumbheśvara *melā*. The festival happens once a year during the full moon night of the Nepalese month Śrāvana (July/August) and incorporates a series of events, represented by different groups of people that are all celebrated beside each other. In the centre of the festivities is the worship of Kumbheśvara in the middle of the interior pond; a ritual which, as was drafted above, emerged out of an ancient snake cult, conducted in order to maintain a regular rainfall. Again, before Kumbheśvara took over, it used to be the snake chief Vāsuki who presided over the water *tīrtha* within the compound. The association of the cult with rain has been covered by the now much more popular Brahmanical celebrations of Janaipurṇimā the full-moon festival of the sacred thread and the Indian festival Rakśabandhan.

During the time of research, many locals did not get tired of explaining that each year, once the procession starts, rain pours from the sky. It therefore seems that until today, the idea behind the ritual is still connected with the assurance of rain and thus represents a merging of the Brahmanical tradition with an ancient indigenous cult. Additionally the Newar tradition of symbolically feeding the frogs to ensure the rainfall, which will be mentioned later on, also points towards the former purpose of the cult.

The procession of carrying the *sanctum* of Śiva covered in snakes to the centre of the interior pond and then back again on the next day, covers a time-span of one night and one day. As was mentioned above, on the same day of the procession other festivals also take place within the compound, which brings together divers ethnic and religious groups from different castes coming from all over the region. The whole event is organised and overlooked by the Kumbheśvara community consisting of temple workers and volunteers from the neighbourhood. The majority of people participating and organising the festival are from Newar castes, while the visitors and devotees have a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, most prominently Buddhists, Hindus, Shamans, Newars and Tamangs.

### **5.3.1. Janaipurṇimā and Rakśabandhan**

For the upperclass males that wear the sacred thread (*tāgā, janai*) respectively Brahmins

and Chetrīs, this festival day traditionally serves as an occasion to change the thread, which is being worn around the neck and underarm beneath their clothing for the rest of the year. This tradition is held and celebrated annually under the name of *Janaipūrṇimā*, which means the “full moon day, or full moon night of the sacred thread.” According to Alexander MacDonald, this ritual derived from ancient India, as it reminds him of the *yajñopavīta*, which originally denoted a ritual, where high-class men receive their sacred thread and in later times indicates the thread, which high-caste adolescents wear during their time of initiation into Vedic studies (*upanayana*). It seems, as if this ritual has been taken over as a whole in Nepal, where it plays an important part in a similar ritual that also initiates the young male attendants into Hinduism called *vratabandhana* (Sk.). The thread consists of three knotted cords that are supposed to symbolize body, speech and mind and which need to be held under control by the carrier of the thread. (Anderson 2005:93) For all members of the society coming from a lower caste, woman, children, Hindus and Buddhists alike, it is also the festival where a red and yellow ribbon called *rakṣa bandhan* (“protection bond”) is being tied around the wrists (Fig. 39), for the woman on the left, for the men on the right. Local Brahmins tie the ribbons inside and outside of the compound around the wrists of their visitors, while uttering: “Thus, I tie the *rakṣa* round your wrist, the same which bound the arm of the mighty Bali, King of the Danavas. May its protection be eternal.” This refers to the story of Viṣṇu’s fifth *avatāra*, the dwarf Vāmana, as written in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. According to the legend, the three earths where ruled under Bali, King of the demons, who had taken a sacred vow to grant every wish that is being asked of him and thus, quickly became very popular. But as soon as his fame and power became even greater than those of Indra, who is the king of the gods and all the deities of the three worlds, the latter became jealous and asked Viṣṇu to help him by breaking the ascendancy of Bali, in order to restore the balance of earth. Since Viṣṇu knew that Bali has taken the vow of charity, he appeared in front of him disguised as a dwarf and begged him to give him land as big as he could cover with three steps. Due to the dwarf’s small size, the King agreed airily, but in the same moment Viṣṇu grew to the size of a giant and instantly covered heaven and earth with two enormous strides. After asking Bali where he should place his third step, the latter answered him after realising that the dwarf is Lord Viṣṇu himself, to place the third foot on his head and thus disappeared into the underworld. As a result, peace reigned again in the three worlds, due to the rightful rule of the gods. For his last act of charity, Viṣṇu

honoured Bali, by making him the king of the underworld. (Anderson 2005:96) The legend, however, continues after Viṣṇu has to follow the king into the underworld, because of the boon the purified king was granted by the deity, which obliged the latter to remain at his side constantly. But without Viṣṇu the heaven was empty and his wife Lakṣmī felt like a widow. So she went down into the underworld (Sk. *pātāla*) to talk with the king. In order to be able to speak to Bali without being intimidated, she tied a silken thread to his wrist. „It was, they say, on the full moon day of Śrāvana, that Lakṣmī tied the silken thread to the wrist of Bali, and so on this day, many Brāhmans go to their patrons and tie silken or golden threads to their wrists.“ (Stevenson 1920:309)

Another story connecting the festival tradition of Rakṣa Bandhan with the famous king Bali goes as thus: “Once there broke out a big battle between Indra, the god King of Heaven and Bali, the Demon King of the underworld. Indra found himself too feeble to fight with Bali yet he tried his best, but all in vain. Bali won the war. Indra was terribly upset and . So he rushed to his guru Brihaspati for help. The guru tied up the Rakshya Bandhan round the wrist of Indra with the chanting of sacred mantras and blesses him for his victory. To say the least, next time he fought with Bali, he won.” (Deep 1999:57 et seq.) A similar legend was written down by another Nepalese author called M.

Manavajra Vajrācārya, translated by MacDonald: One day, Indra got into troubles with several demonical beings (Daityas, Dānavas and Asuras) and asked his *guru* Bṛashapati for advice. Then Indrāṇī intervened and told him, that there is no reason to be afraid of the demons, since she knows a way to conquer them. After Indra begged her to tell him the secret, she called her personal priest, who blessed a thread by his mantras and tied it around Indra’s wrist. Through this act, Indra’s spirit was strengthened and he set out for a battle against the demonical groups. Subsequently the Daityas, Dānavas and Asuras fled and Indra was victorious. (MacDonald 1975: 24 et seq.)

Many visitors to the festival emphasized that the thread brings them good luck and protects them from evil influences. This belief might be connected with the legends mentioned above. Within the distribution of the ribbons during the Kumbheśvara *melā*, however, there are distinctions to be made. The Brahmins distribute yellow and red ribbons and ask for a small donation (*bhikṣā*) from the visitors, while the main priest and his brothers distribute ribbons that look different and give them away from the inside of the Kumbheśvara temple through the open windows on the southern and western sides. The priest and some locals claim that there is no difference between those two kinds of

ribbons, but that many people prefer to get one from the main priest. „People are happy with our *pūjāri*, he is very popular in our neighbourhood. That's why many people want a *rākhi* from him“. (Visitor 2010)<sup>57</sup> In Gopal Singh Nepalis study „The Newars“, however, the author does mention a distinction of the ribbons based on ethnical background. „There is, however, a slight difference between those two communities with regard to the thread (*rakhi*) that is used. The Gorkha Brahmins use only the yellow thread, whereas the Deo Bhaju Brahmins tie to the yellow thread several tiny packets containing incense, *neem*-leaf, *gorochan*, vermillion, *Duba*-grass, mustard seeds, curd and rice.“ (Nepali 1965:400) Nepali thus describes a different distribution of ribbons by the Deo Bhaju Brahmins, which is another denotation for the Hindu Newar Brahmins. This tradition is being perpetuated until today. While the Gorkhali Brahmins distribute red and yellow threads outside of the main temple, the Newar Brahmins have their own ribbons, which they give from the inside of the main temple to the visitors, who are lining up in front of it (Fig. 40). Traditionally people wear the thread for around three months until *Lakṣmīpūjā*, the festival of lights, where they detach the ribbon and then tie it on the tail of a cow. This cow, so the legend goes, will assist the donor of the ribbon to cross the River Bhaitarna after his death, as well as other obstacles that need to be passed in order to reach the Gates of Judgement by allowing the dead soul to hold on his tail and be guided (Anderson 2005:94). It may be important to note that the main purpose of the festival *Rakṣa Bandhan* in India and in the southern Nepalese Terai region is the tying of a ribbon from a sister on her brother's wrist, which should not be mixed up with the tradition popular in the Kathmandu Valley, that has a distinct festivity to demonstrate the sisters' reverence for her brother called *bhai tīka* and which is being celebrated every year on the last day of *Tihār*, the Newar celebration of the new year.

For the Buddhist Newar population, the festival day marks the victory of Lord Buddha over the tempter *Māra*, who symbolises the struggles and difficulties *Śakya Muni* Gautama had to face on his way to *Nirvāṇa* and to reach enlightenment to finally become the Buddha. (MacDonald 1975:299, Tautscher 2007:136) Many Buddhist Newars also worship *Kumbheśvara*. A visitor explains that they worship the Vedic god as a form of *Vajrapāni*, an important figure for the followers of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

Another group of visitors are Tamang groups who come on this day to worship their *istadeva*, their main god *Mahādeva*. Among the ethnic group of the Tamang, Shaman

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<sup>57</sup> Visitor of the *Kumbheśvara* temple compound, personal conversation, 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2010.

healers (*bompos*, or *jhākris*, as they are called within the Kathmandu Valley) play a significant role during the festival. The Religion of the Tamangs belongs to the Tibetan form of Buddhism mixed with several elements of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion. Due to their spatial closeness and corporate trading history with the Newars, some elements of Hinduism were also introduced into their ritual practise; thus, they worship Śiva as one of their ancestral protectors (*pholha*). By constantly moving their bodies and hitting their ritual drums (*dgangra*), they aim to fall into trance and connect with the god (Fig. 41). During the festival in 2010 there were a few groups of younger aspirants whose state of trance has been overlooked by already initiated shamans. People who want to become a *jhānkri* have to do a pilgrimage to the lake of Gosaikund (Fig. 42) situated in the middle hills of the Himalayas on an altitude of 4300 meters in order to complete their formation. According to the locals, this lake has a mythical connection with the Kathmandu Valley, by supplying the Budha Nilakantha pond at the foot of Śivapuri, the pond of Bala Nilakantha near the Balaju springs and the interior pond of the Kumbheśvara temple compound in Lalitpur with its sacred waters. A visit to one of these *tīrthas* is thus an alternative, when the arduous journey into the hills not possible.

### 5.3.2. Pilgrimage to the lake of Gosaikund

The lake of Gosaikund is situated within the Rasuwa district in the Himalayan region of Langtang. To conduct the pilgrimage takes about one week and can be very exhausting, especially because it happens during the monsoon season when the trails are slippery. Nonetheless, every year hundreds of worshippers accomplish the sacred route to take a bath in its waters on the day of Janaipūrṇimā. Among them are also many ritual healers who lead the people from the surrounding villages to the lake, which they call “*Tsho kar*”, “the white lake”. The festival of Janaipūrṇimā is therefore called “*Tsho kar Choppa*”, “Offering at the white lake”. “Until far into the night, the *bompo* offers incense to the gods and goddesses, invoking the deities and drumming himself into trance. The next day he adds corn, butter lamps, oil and a bottle of alcohol to the brass pot with Mahadev’s crystal, the stone and the water knife. The pot is carried by his assistant, and the *bompo*, drumming and dancing, leads his group of villagers on their pilgrimage to Gosainkund.” (Tautscher 2007:143) Additionally, they ritually re-enact Śivas aperture of the springs each year under the protection of their tutelary deities (Seti Devi, one of the

“Mother deities” and Māhadēva) and mediate between the living and the dead as well as supernatural beings in order to produce new life-force and healing power. The life forces are represented by the water sources, which are then again connected with the mother-goddesses. (Tautscher 2007:176)

The earliest document to be found that mentions the lake is from the year 1447 and describes the royal pilgrimage of King Jaya Yaksha Malla Deva of Bhaktapur (1428-82) to Śivaluti or Śilu, which is the old Newar name for the lake. The document says that the king walked the distance of 80 km for nine days from Bhaktapur to Gosaikund and stayed there for three nights and four days. Being there he took a bath and gave alms and gifts. (Tautscher 2007:136) Another good description of the pilgrimage was given by Henry Oldfield in the 19th century: „The largest of these lakes is called Gosainkund or sometimes Nilkhiat kund, after Mahadeo Nilkhiat (Blue neck) to whose honour it is sacred. To worship a rock which is thought by the pious to represent that deity, and to bathe in the sacred lake in which that rock is sunk, many hundreds of pilgrims annually resort to Gosainthan in the months of July, August and September, at which period the passes are open in consequence of the greater part of the preceding winter’s snow having melted away during the summer heat. However, the journey to Gosainthan is always a difficult and dangerous one (...) In one of the largest rocks on the northern edge of the Gosai-kund are three deep clefts, from each of which a spring pours its waters in a perpetual cascade into the lake which lies about thirty feet below.” (Oldfield 1974:29-30) The lake is believed to be the source of the Trisūli river, denoted after the legend of the lake:

“The three cascades are called Trisul dhara. These three springs and the lake beneath them are fabled to have been formed by Shiva Mahadeo, who when the gods churned the ocean in order to obtain from it the water of immortality, had drunk the poison which arose from the sea during the operation. This made him fall into a swoon, which would have proved fatal had not Durga received him by use of certain incantations. This poison, though it did not destroy the god, produced the most excessive pain and thirst, and caused a permanent blue discolouration of his neck, whence he received the name of Nilkhiat or ‘the Blue throated’. Hoping to relieve his sufferings and allay the burning fever which consumed him, Mahadeo repaired to the snow in this secluded region, and thrusting his trident or trisul into the mountain side, three streams of water immediately gushed forth. Their waters collecting in the hollow beneath produced a lake, which was called, after the god, the lake of Nilkhiat. Mahadeo stretched himself along its edge, and assuaged his thirst by drinking its waters.” (Oldfield 1974:30-31)

Oldfield's legend is a story from the Purāṇas mixed with local elements. It claims that the origin of the Triśūli river is the the lake of Gosaikund, though in fact, it is just a tributary of the main stream that has its origin in Tibet. There are, however, several interpretations surrounding the origin of the lake, especially surrounding the mysterious stone, which, due to the clear water of the lake, can sometimes be seen at its bottom. An old Tibetan text called "Jam-glin Rgyas-bcad" written by the Buddhist master Lama Tsampo (Tib. Bla ma Btsan po) in 1820, opens up, in the section on Nepal, the Buddhist perception of the stone:

"There is a pond not unlike a lake, there is a natural stone figure that has a human shape. It is of grey-blue colour, its face hidden by a saffron-coloured scarf, and it seems to be laying on its back (protected by) its nine cobra heads. The heretics in India think it is Śiva (Dbañ phyug), and worship it frequently. But although it is famous throughout India, many Buddhists in India and Nepal do not worship it. Moreover, among the Tibetans who call it Klu gan-rkyal<sup>58</sup> and Klu gdo-pa<sup>59</sup> there are certainly many who do not worship it at all. ... Now despite his ordinary external appearance, which is natural, it is in fact an image of Arya-Avalokiteśvara (Phags-pa Thugs-rje Chen-po<sup>60</sup>). If anyone wants to know why this is so, it is because, although many heretics worship Śiva (Phyugs-bdag<sup>61</sup>), and texts like the Kāraṇḍa-vyūha Sūtra claim that he is a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara (Phags-pa). Again, if anyone asks why this image is famous among the Hindus as Śiva, it is because it already existed in the world long ago, before the Buddha came into the world. Since, in those days, no one in the world was reputed to be more powerful than Śiva (Dbañ-phyug), the figure became famous in Hindu terms. While taking these arguments into consideration, one should not take the figure to be that of a Hindu god." (MacDonald 1975:300-301)

The scripture shows that Tibetans also used to go on a pilgrimage to Gosaikund and worshipped the stone. Names like "supine *nāga*," or "the outcaste *nāga* group" point towards an old snake cult that has been subsumed by Brahmanical and Buddhist tradition. While the lake is nowadays famous as a Hindu destination of pilgrimage, Buddhists also come and worship the stone as the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The latter has strongly been influenced by the Hindu god Śiva, as can be seen by their shared number of epithets such as *iśvara*, *maheśvara* or *lokeśvara* ("lord", "great lord", "lord of the world"). Because of these similarities, it was possible to worship Śiva as a Bodhisattva and as a

<sup>58</sup> „Supine *nāga*“

<sup>59</sup> „The outcaste *nāga* group“

<sup>60</sup> Epithet of Avalokiteśvara

<sup>61</sup> Paśupathi, epithet of Śiva

form of Avalokiteśvara. While in India Buddhist cults were completely absorbed by Hinduism, in Nepal this form of amalgamation was used as a possibility to survive within a Hindu context. Also interesting, is Tsampo's description of the stone as “(....) a natural stone figure that has a human shape. It is of grey-blue colour, its face hidden by a saffron-coloured scarf, and it seems to be lying on its back (protected by) its nine cobra heads.” The description reminds one immediately of Viṣṇu laying on a serpent hood at Budha Nilakantha. In fact, it is believed among Hindus, that the stone representing Śiva is also a manifestation of Viṣṇu. According to a legend recounted by MacDonald, there used to be a king of Nepal who was unable to see Śiva at the bottom of the lake of Gosaikund. He therefore ordered to build a figure similar to the one in the lake situated in another place. Subsequently a craftsman built the image in a place called Budha Nilakantha and the king was finally able to see it. (MacDonald 1975:301)

A local myth tells of the discovery of the lake and the origin of Janaipūrṇimā:

“Long, long ago Gosainkund was a difficult place where people could not see, could not hear, where people should not come. The gods (*lha*) were flying in the air and talking to each other. They saw a mountain and they saw a lake surrounded by mountains. They saw Mahadev in the form of Changresi (Avalokiteshvara) inside the lake, and he had four hands and four heads. The heads of Mahadev were looking in the four directions: to the east the face was clean, bright and beautiful, because the sun rises in the east. To the west the face was dirty, black and with big goitres on the neck, because in the west there is no sun. To the north his face had the ears and eyes of a human being, and the nose and mouth of an elephant. To the south his face was like that of a wild boar. He had the body of a human being, and the head of a cow with horns. On the top of the four heads looking in the cardinal directions was a head like that of Shiva –a human head with big earrings. The body of Mahadev was that of a human being.” (Tautscher 2007:165)

According to Tautscher it is typical for mountain regions to divide the world into a dark west and a bright east, which is connected with the shady and the sunny sides of the slopes. The author continues that the metaphorical elephant connects Buddhism with the Tibetan North and the metaphor of the wild boar (Varāha), which is an early Viṣṇu-Avatāra, with Hinduism in the South. Avalokiteśvara/Mahādeva is in the centre of the *mandala* and the cow may refer to Śivas vehicle Nandin or to a Tibetan protective deity. (Tautscher 2007:165)

Some of these allocations are quite problematic. The elephant face pointing to the North could also represent the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa, who belongs to the Hindu Pantheon. The Vedic god Indra also rides on a white elephant, but the cardinal direction

he is associated with is the East. Finally Avalokiteśvara is usually depicted with eleven heads and not with four as the legend describes. The meaning of the image this legend provides is therefore quite bizarre and cannot be surely determined. The myth, however, continues thus:

“Gosainkund is said to be the head of Mahadev, Pashupatinath in the Kathmandu Valley is his feet, the right eye is the moon the left eye is the sun, his ears are the stars. Mahadev is sitting on gold and silver. The east is the sunny side, where people are beautiful and rich and possess many fields. The west is dark, where people are ugly and poor and their fields are barren. When the gods saw Mahadev, he said to them that all people were to make pilgrimages to him at Gosainkund at janai purnima and bring offerings and that he would help them all. Mahadev would fulfil the wish for wealth, and ganga would fulfil the wish for a child and for cattle.” (Tautscher 2007:166)

Here a connection is made between Gosaikund and the Kathmandu Valley, which is dominated by Hinduism. As Gabriele Tautscher describes, Mahādeva is seen among the Shamans as the brother of the goddess Ganga and it was him who told the gods that all people should conduct a pilgrimage to visit him at Gosaikund during Janaipūrṇimā. Accomplishing this task will lead to a wealthy life, while a bath in the river Ganga will lead to children and cattle.

All those different myths of origin and ways of seeing among different groups of people, however, are an example of the co-existance of various religious traditions as it is so typical for this region. Focusing on the sacred lake of Gosaikund, different cults evolved, which demonstrate a complex blending of the two main religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, with local shamanic traditions.

### 5.3.3. *Gunhu Puni*

Back in Lalitpur's Newar Community, the day of Janaipūrṇimā also marks the beginning of Gunhu Puni, the opener of a nine-day celebration, rooted exclusively within the Newar culture. In the centre of *Gunhu Puni* is the *byanja nakegu*, the symbolical feeding of frogs conducted primarily by Jyapu families in the course of the annual transplantation of their plants. Beside serpents, frogs are another kind of amphibians, which are venerated by the Newars. It is believed that they are also responsible for the rainfall due to the loud noise they make. Therefore farming Newar families go out into their paddy fields and offer them rice and nine types of beans. The offerings are being put on plates made out of

leaves, which are then placed on the edges of the fields and in front of temples and shrines. (Nepali 1965: 327) This Newar tradition seems to be more close to the former cult of the *nāgas*, which used to happen on the same full moon day, than the now popular festival of *Janaipūrṇimā*.

A Newar informant tells that on the eve of Gunhu Puni he gathers with his family to eat a *chhwela bhu*, which is a dish with *baji*, *chhwela* (New. roasted meat), and sometimes curry served with beer (New. *thon*) or spirits (New. *ayela*), the typical dish before every Newar ceremony. The next day, the day of Gunhu Puni, Newar families eat a special soup called *kwati*, which is some kind of oatmeal gruel, made out of nine different types of beans, which are said to clean the stomach. The festival day is therefore also called *kwatipuni*. Beside the widespread belief that the croaking of frogs encourages rain, there is also a legend of frogs, which lured a demon into a deadly swamp and thus saved the community from the demon's terror. (Nepali 1965:327)

Obviously, and as in the rest of South Asia, the assurance of rain traditionally plays an important part in the life of the Newars, especially among the Maharjan caste, the Newar caste of agriculturists, for whom rain is a fundamental base for their production. It is therefore no surprise that many songs and rituals surround this topic and are still recited within the community today.

#### **5.3.4. Kumbheśvara Procession/*Jātra*, Part One**

On the night before the *melā*, hundreds of people gather at the Kumbheśvara temple to witness the annual installation of the linga in the interior pond. The ceremony is inaugurated by a group of musicians, which come from the Swayambhu area and perform traditional orchestral music called *nau bhajana*, which means the playing of religious music with “nine” instruments. Quotation marks are used for the number nine, because the group played more than nine music instruments. It can therefore be assumed that the number nine does not denote the exact number of instruments, but rather stands symbolically for a certain notion of endlessness with which the number is often associated in the region. The typical instruments used for the *bhajana*, however, are called Dhīmaya, Nagarā, Nayakhin, Bhuya and Nyake. The Dhīmaya (Fig. 43) is a cylindrical drum made out of wood and skin, which is used for many Newar festivals or ceremonial rituals. The instrument is mainly played by Jyāpu -families, especially during

the time of the festival. By beating the skin on both ends with a bamboo stick on one side and with the end of the other, a rhythmic sound is produced which forms the base for most of the music orchestras in the area. The *Nagarā* is a single drum that is put on the ground and played with two sticks (Fig. 44). The *Nayakhin* is the name for a combination of two instruments, a small drum (*Naya*) and a pair of cymbals (*Khin*) and is mostly played by *Khadgī* families, which is why this caste got the nickname “*Nayos*” (Fig. 44). The *Bhuya* are a big pair of cymbals and the *Nyake* are carved wind instruments made out of buffalo horns, which are played by the *Śakya* and *Thandukar* castes (Fig. 46). Finally the *Madala* also plays an important role. Only during rare occasions like the *Kumbheśvara melā*, a representative of a Newar caste is playing this instrument. It is known all over Nepal and usually played by people from *Chetrī* or *Brahmin* castes. It emerges at almost every festivity, especially for the *lok dohori*, a common group dance to which it gives the rhythm. The instrument is made out of wood and goatskin, which is attached to its body with skin straps. Both ends are covered with a substance called *khari*, a mixture of cooked rice that gives the instrument its distinct sound. The *nau bhajana* music group is thus a mixture of different Hindu- and Buddhist Newar castes, each one with its own instrument. After the *nau bhajana*, the priest and his younger brother gather in the main temple to remove the snake linga covered in orange cloth, which presides in the centre of the *Kumbheśvara* temple during the whole month of *Śrāvana* and, after conducting the puja, replace it with the *caturmukhalinga* sheath, which will remain there for the rest of the year.

Around eleven o’clock at night, the preparations are finished and the protagonists of the ceremony are gathering in front of the northern entrance of the main temple such as the main priest Madhav Sharma, with shaved hair and beard as it is demanded before *Janaipūrṇimā* and Aroj Kumar *Khādgī*, the chairman of the *tol sudhāta samiti*, the Neighbourhood Development Committee. Accompanied by a man who fans the smoke of the glowing coals on the *sanctum*, a *Bhaṇḍārī* carrying an oil lamp, a carrier of the umbrella to protect the god and Aroj *Khaḍgī*, playing the *damaru*, Madhav Shyam Sharma leaves the temple from the northern exit with the decorated *sanctum* in his arms (Fig. 47). The group takes the right side around the temple and goes to the *Bagalāmukhī* temple. There, the members of the *bhajana mandala*, a religious group dedicated to the tantric goddess are already waiting and subsequently start to play music and sing devotional songs (Fig. 48). Being there, the *sanctum* is presented to the goddess. The

priest remains a while in front of her shrine surrounded by his attendants and presents the Vedic god to the tantric goddess. Thereafter, the whole group continues to the eastern entrance of the main temple where they also remain for about ten minutes and then continue walking directly to the interior pond. A few men from the Tandukhar caste await the group by playing the Kanha, an almost two-meter-long wind instrument that is fixed on their bodies with wooden sticks (Fig. 49). With their convulsive sound, they remind the audience of the seriousness and importance of the following event. Space is being made, so that Madhav Sharma can step on the wooden plank that leads to the centre of the pond. The atmosphere is tense, the music gets louder and Sharma brings the *sanctum* together with his younger brother to the centre (Fig. 50) and then finally performs the government (*sarkāri*) puja, to install it. This act completes the first part of the procession route and the crowd starts to form a queue to worship Śiva, while the younger ones cheerfully jump into the water (Fig. 51). From the top floor of the main entrance building, young members of the Kumbheśvara compound coordinate the masses, by giving orders of behaviour through the speakers.

### 5.3.5. Kumbheśvara Procession/*Jātra*, Part Two

After sunset on the next day, around eight, or nine pm, Madhav Sharma and his younger brother go back to the wooden platform, to pick up the linga (Fig. 52). The main priest releases the object from its installation place and prepares to bring it back to the temple. Accompanied by a cheering crowd and musicians, he passes the main temple from the backside and goes to the temple of Bagalāmukhī, where he remains again for some time, while the *bhajana mandala* play their music. The *pūjāri* then continues to the main entrance of the Kumbheśvara temple, remains there for a while and then walks in an anti-clockwise direction back into the northern entrance. There he enters the inner ambulatory and places the linga in the southeastern corner of the *chela*.

What is remarkable here is the walking direction of Madhav Sharma who makes a half circle around the temple, in an anti-clockwise direction. In both Hinduism and Buddhism the clockwise walking direction around a sacred place is compulsory and therefore Sharma's route is quite surprising. Even the visitors, as outlined in chapter 3.6, adhere to a clockwise walking direction and always make a full circle around the temple of Kumbheśvara. It may be possible, that an influence of the pre-Buddhist Bön tradition is

responsible for the development of such a procession route. The Bön tradition used to be widespread in Tibet until the 8th century and goes back to Buddha Tönpa Shenrab (sTon-pa gShen-rab), who is believed to predate Buddha Śakyāmuni. With the emergence of Buddhism, the Bön-Tradition has slowly been ousted as the main religion of the area and its followers became a minority. The religious practise of the followers of Bön involves many shamanistic elements, for example the adherence of an anti-clockwise walking direction around *chörtens*, or other venerated objects and buildings. Additional relations with Shamanism are rites to pacify the spirits, the ability to influence the weather and the healing of human beings. The fact that the Kumbheśvara temple is also an important pilgrimage spot for *jhākris* and that the compound has been a place of sacred rituals since a very long time -as can be seen by the ancient objects that can still be found within the complex- makes it even more likely, that earlier traditions can be discovered behind the Brahmanical disguise. The temple officials, as well as the main priest, however, reject this idea, and emphasize that the origin of the tradition has its roots in a Hindu concept. But why does the priest take an anti-clockwise procession route? „Generally we believe that we cannot surround Mahādeva fully. There needs to remain a little space, a little gap open. Mahādeva should not be rounded fully. (...) it's rules are Vedic, not Bön.” (Sharma 2010: )<sup>62</sup>

Due to the trend of Sanskritization as mentioned above, however, it is very likely that the roots based in the Bön-Tradition have been repressed, or slowly replaced by a Vedic past.

### 5.3.6. Changes and Adaptations

There are two older articles that describe the Kumbheśvara procession. They differ, however, at one point from the one experienced during the time of research in a crucial way. Mary Anderson who lived in Kathmandu for five years published the first one in 1971. She describes in her book, how she saw a group of men carrying the image of Bagalāmukhī on their shoulders and presented it to Lord Śiva on the night before Janaipūrṇimā: “From her temple bordering the courtyard the image of the goddess Bagala Mukhi Ajima, borne on the shoulders of several men, is carried through the spectators, and is ‘presented to Lord Shiva’. Now the officiating priest carries the heavy,

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<sup>62</sup> Madhav Shyam Sharma, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

gleaming lingam, wreathed in garlands, through the courtyard, assisted by a surrounding throng.” (Anderson 2005:95) Hemanta Jha, a well-known culture critic of Nepal wrote the second account, which was published in 1996 and describes the ritual part as follows: “(...) the Shivalingam is carried over to the pond, only when the image of the goddess Bagla Mukhi Ajima is brought by the people to the Mahadev temple at Kumbheshwar. The tradition is that the time when the holy priest of worshipping the lord, and receiving the offerings of the people, the goddess Bagla Mukhi Ajima is brought by the people accompanied with musical troops and trumpets. The goddess is presented to Mahadev, and only then the holy rites end.” (Jha 1996:82)

Both of these descriptions claim that before the procession starts, Bagalāmukhī is brought out of her shrine and is presented to Lord Śiva in front of his temple, but this was not the case in the procession during the time of fieldwork in August/September 2010. In the account for the present work concerning the procession route, it is Lord Śiva who is being carried to Bagalāmukhī and not the other way around. When asking the priest, several locals and some temple workers, whether they have changed the ritual in the past years, no one could remember anything like that. Since both of the older descriptions are quite detailed it can be assumed that the procession has been altered in recent times, or more precisely, earliest in 1996, when Hemanta Jha published his account of the former procession route.

The alternation of the procession route is very likely to have happened because of two additional changes concerning the shrine of Bagalāmukhī, which all point to a holistic upgrading of the goddesses status.

The first one happened around the same time period (around 1996), when Bagalāmukhīs fame increased dramatically within the Valley. According to the local scholar Basant Maharjan, her popularity has been caused through the publicity of the last royal fortune teller (*jyotiṣī*) Prof. Mangal Raj Joshi who served under the former king Birendra Bir Bikram Shah (reign: 1972 until 2001). “Bagalāmukhī is very important among the young people. The people of Lalitpur are very passionate with this god. There was one *jyotiṣī*, a future teller, who told everybody who came: ‘You don’t have a girl-, or boyfriend? Go to Bagalāmukhī and pray!’ After that, the shrine was crowded. His name is Mangal Raj Joshi, before nobody was interested in this goddess. People who already

have a girl-or boyfriend go there to tighten their relationship.” (Maharjan 2010)<sup>63</sup> Many visitors confirmed, that young devotees worship her preferably in order to improve their love lives. “Most of the people that come here are young and still unmarried. They come here to pray to Bagalāmukhī for a good husband. Also when they are already engaged, before the marriage ceremony starts, they have to come here also.” (Visitor 2010)<sup>64</sup> As a result, the temple compound now also serves as an excellent meeting spot for adolescents who are interested in a relationship. Just like the young married couple from a Śreṣṭa family as introduced in chapter 3.8.1, many others hope to find a partner at the Bagalāmukhī shrine on a Thursday. The fact that Bagalāmukhī is worshipped to improve the love life is rather interesting, since in the third myth as recounted in chapter 3.8, she is described as a husband-eating wife and the widow of Śiva. This myth, however, also opens up the connection between Bagalāmukhī and Pārvatī, Śivas wife. While Bagalāmukhī represents the anti-model of a good wife and a powerful woman who can even defeat the great god Śiva, Pārvatī is famous for having conquered her husband with great love and affection and as an obedient and caring wife. The way of worshipping her, which the respected Astrologer promoted, therefore points strongly into the direction of identifying Bagalāmukhī as Pārvatī, a respected Vedic goddess and obedient wife. The second change is the acquisition of Bagalāmukhīs shrine by the caste of the Rajopadhyāya Brahmans, who until then, were probably only responsible for the worship of Śiva in his form as Kumbheśvara. Even though the main priest of the Kumbheśvara temple is certain that his ancestors have always been the ones responsible for both deities, this seems quite unlikely, since it is unusual, that a Brahmin priest conducts the puja for a tantric goddess. As a tantric deity, Bagalāmukhī stands on a lower level within the hierarchy system and her menu traditionally consists of “impure” offerings such as meat, alcohol and animal sacrifices. Because of this, the priest responsible for a Vedic deity is traditionally not allowed to get into contact with a tantric goddess, since he would lose his status of purity. During the time of research, however, neither animal sacrifices for the goddess, nor any other offerings that are considered as “impure” and therefore appropriate for a tantric goddess, were seen. A local from the Agniśāla area of Lalitpur explains, that devotees sometimes do bring animals for Bagalāmukhī, but most of the time, they do not kill them. “They bring it and sometimes

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<sup>63</sup> Basant Maharjan, personal conversation, 5<sup>th</sup> of August, 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>64</sup> Visitor (female, Maharjan caste), personal conversation, 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

they sacrifice and eat it, but sometimes they just give it to her. Personally I have never seen any sacrifice here. They can, but they don't do it. There are special areas for this, like Dakṣīnkālī." (Krishna Bahadur Gurung 2010)<sup>65</sup> On Thursdays, crowds of people gather in front of her shrine and spend up to two hours in queues in order to bring her offerings that can be bought at the outside of the compound. The weekday is locally dedicated to the goddess, after the royal astrologer Mangal Raj Joshi promoted it. These offering plates usually contain a coconut, five wicks dipped in oil, a banana, yellow and orange flowers, incense sticks, orange cloth and a yellow sweet (Fig. 53). The offerings are all vegetarian and thus, traditionally not suitable for a tantric goddess. So what is it that prevents the visitors from worshipping Bagalāmukhī in the traditional, tantric way? First of all it is important to look again at the physical landscape of the compound. What most notably stands out, is the opposition between Kumbheśvara, a pure, vegetarian and thus "sophisticated" deity worshipped through puja in the North and Bagalāmukhī, a tantric deity, "wild", impure, "unsophisticated" and female in the South. The fact, that Bagalāmukhī is worshipped with puja and pure foods and that the same priest that is responsible for the daily puja of Kumbheśvara is now also responsible for her shrine, may be analysed thus: from the brahmanical perspective, the modified practise serves as an upgrade of her status, from an impure tantric goddess, to a vegetarian higher deity, which serves to underline the power, emanating from her shrine. This adaptation of the religious practise to Brahmanical norms opens a connection with the term of "Sanskritization", which is usually applied for denoting the desire of low-class groups to ascent the social ladder by copying the social and religious practises of higher castes. "The process, sometimes called "Sanskritization," began in Vedic times and was probably the principal method by which the Hinduism of the Sanskrit texts spread through the subcontinent and into Southeast Asia. Sanskritization still continues in the form of the conversion of tribal groups, and it is reflected in the persistence of the tendency among some Hindus to identify rural and local deities with the gods of the Sanskrit texts. Sanskritization also refers to the process by which some Hindus try to raise their status by adopting high-caste customs, such as wearing the sacred cord and becoming vegetarians."<sup>66</sup> In the case of Bagalāmukhī a lower class has been ousted by a stronger one (Rajopadhyāya Brahmins) and only the deity has been sanskritized, not the

<sup>65</sup> Krishna Bahadur Gurung, personal conversation, 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Lalitpur.

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/266312/Hinduism/8975/Other-sources-the-process-of-Sanskritization> (12th of February 2011)

priestly caste. The forbearance of blood sacrifice indicates the domestication, based on the relation between husband and wife, in that case between Śiva and Pārvatī and thus marks the subordination of Bagalāmukhī, in the vicinity of Kumbheśvara, the dominating husband that represents the pure, brahmanical caste. The case study of Bagalāmukhī thus, seems to show the replacement of a strong tantric goddess including her cult, with a “gentle” Pārvatī, that is subordinated to the Śaiva sanctuary, in a much clearer fashion. What is happens here is definitely a process of Sanskritization, but rather one from above and not out of itself, otherwise the Kāpālis would have a higher status.

It is very likely that this change of offerings, from “impure” tantric animal sacrifices to “pure” vegetarian gifts, is directly connected with the adoption of the shrine through the Brahmin priests and subsequently with a certain effort from their side, to repress animal sacrifice and other “impure” oblations. It is not clear when exactly this change happened, but it is quite likely that before the Brahmins took over and changed Bagalāmukhīs way of tantric worship into a Brahmanic one, it where the precursors of the Kāpālikas who worshiped the tantric goddess in the traditional way, by offering her the blood of animals.

The Kāpālikas are a low-status Hindu sect of married Śaiva ascetics and are known in Lalitpur as Bagalāmukhīs so-called *deopālas*, or god-guardians. One of them explains that it is their job to keep the shrine clean and help the devotees with their worship, for example by cutting coconuts open, or selling oil lamps on the spot. Once a year, the Kāpālikas are being appointed for a more important task. During the so-called *pañcabali*, which happens annually in the Nepalese month of Manghir (November/December), Bagalāmukhī is being offered animal sacrifices for which the Kāpālikas are taking over. *Pañcabali* means “five sacrifices,” in this case, the sacrifice of five types of animals, respectively buffaloes, goats, sheep, ducks and chickens who are immolated in front of Bagalāmukhīs shrine. The Brahman priest of the main temples is not participating. As a local of the Kumbheśvara area tells, buffaloes can be brought and killed by any visitor, for the rest of the killing, the Kāpālikas are responsible. The annual ritual of *pañcabali* points to the former tradition of worshipping Bagalāmukhī, and to the role of the predecessors of the Kāpālikas, who may have conducted it. By changing Bagalāmukhīs way of worship from a tantric one, into a Brahmanic one, the Rajopadhyāya Brahmins also changed or rather raised her status from a low-class fierce goddess, to a high-class

deity worshipped by Brahmins, who thus expanded their field of influence.

The origin of the Kāpālikas is in the South of India, in the Deccan. This region south of the Vindhyas has been dominated by Śaivism since early times. The precise date of the foundation of the Kāpālika sect, however, remains obscure, but may have happened around the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which also marks the time of the first development of tantric literature. (Lorenzen 1972:53) The earliest source that mentions the word *kāpālin* (“one who bears a skull”) is probably in the Yājñavalkyasmṛti iii. 243 (c. 100-300 AD). In this text, the penance for one who has killed a Brahman is being described. It says that the murderer has to live on alms for twelve years, carry a skull (*śirah-kāpāli*) and a staff and beg for food while recounting his deed to every donor. This chief penance prescribed for the removal of the sin imposed through conducting a *brahmahatyā*, is being strongly connected with the Kāpālikas by many sources. The following myth of the beheading of the god Brahmā by Śiva forms the divine archetype of the Kāpālika identity with the sin of killing a Brahmin. In the Matsya Purāṇa version of this myth, Pārvatī asks her husband Śiva why he never leaves the Avimukta land in Varanasi, where the Kāpālamocana (“Setting free of the skull) *tīrtha* is located. Śiva then tells a story to his wife:

“Formerly, O Varārohā, there was an excellent fifth head of Brahmā. It arose, O Śuśronī, having the same lustre as gold. When that flaming fifth head of the great-souled one was produced, O Devī, he said (to me): ‘I know (the circumstances of) your birth.’ Then, filled with anger and my eyes inflamed, I cut of his (fifth) head with the tip of the nail of my left thumb. Brahmā (then) said: ‘When you cut off the head of me who is guiltless, you will become a Kapālin endowed with a curse. Having become burdened with the (sin of) Brahmahatyā you should visit the tīrthas on earth.’” (Lorenzen 1972:77, 78)

In order to repent of his sin Śiva had to follow a set of rules called Mahāvrata in the Viṣṇu Smṛti<sup>67</sup>. These rules form the basis of the ritual behaviour of the Kāpālis. By re-enacting Śivas penance, they hoped to reach a mystical identification or communion with their great god. While the Kāpālikas worshiped both Bhairava and his consort, their *bhakti* (personal devotion to a personal god) was solely focused on Śiva in his form as Bhairava. The fierce manifestation of Śiva is in the centre of the Kāpālikas cult and thus explains the presence of the sect within the compound.

Whether the predecessors of the Kāpālikas where the ones in charge of Bagalāmukhī can

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<sup>67</sup> See: Lorenzo 1972:74

only be presumed. The history may have been veiled on purpose to erase the former priesthood out of memory. Whoever it was, the Brahmanical priests have expanded their area of influence by ousting the tantric element and altering the tradition. With the acquisitions of Bagalāmukhīs shrine, the Brahmins managed to spread their power into the southern plains of the temple compound, as is being demonstrated, through the slow acceleration of Bagalāmukhīs status by covering her tantric background.

## 6. Afterword

The present work provides a detailed ethnography of the Kumbheśvara temple compound in Lalitpur, Nepal. On the basis of fieldwork and secondary literature the sacred landscape was examined together with its shrines, temples, god-images and visitors as well as the present temple authorities that currently run the decision-making process and their influence on the temple's meaning and perception.

The first part of the work focussed on the city of Lalitpur and the socio-political context of the Newars who form the majority within the area of the Kumbheśvara temple compound. The fieldwork, however, quickly revealed that it is not possible to speak of "the Newars" as a distinct ethnic group. It was made clear that their cultural traditions evolved out of a constant exchange with other surrounding cultural influences. Even more importantly, however, their own definition of identity rests upon factors such as locality, caste and religious belief that form the complex body of Newar society. The general term "Newar" has basically been used as a way of distinguishing one self from the Nepālī-speaking Parbatyās, who originated in the western part of the country since the unification of Nepal in 1769.

Chapter 2.2 indicated that concerning religious belief within the Newar system, a hierarchical order has been established between the two religious streams since ancient times. Hindu priests are considered higher in rank than Buddhist Vajrācāryas and Śākyas, which is why the former usually holds the power within religious institutions. The erection of a temple dedicated to the Buddhist goddess Hārītī in 1991 after a local Buddhist called Indra Bahadur Khadgī spoke up for it, however, points towards a strengthening of the local Buddhist majority within the area of the Kumbheśvara temple compound. Many locals claimed that the lack of a Hārītī temple prevented the compound of being a fully equipped cosmological model and that it was the goddess herself who ordered to build it. The main temple dedicated to Kumbheśvara, however, and the popular shrine of the tantric goddess Bagalāmukhī are both nowadays ritually controlled by a Brahman of the Rājopāphyāya Hindu-caste. As was shown

in chapter 2.2 and 2.3 until today the ancient hierarchical order between the two main religious streams, *śivamārgī* and *buddhamārgī* with the latter representing the dominant religious power, is still upright and even in times of theoretical equality many inhabitants still convert to Hinduism in order to benefit from the considerable social and political advantages of being a Hindu. As the erection of Hārītī temple demonstrated, however, the Buddhist majority and especially the Khadgīs push their rights to be present within the compound with considerable success.

Alternatively, but more unlikely, the construction of the Hārītī temple could be viewed as the result of a weakening-process of religion and caste affiliation as the stabilising factor of prevailing hierarchies in a modernised society. As was shown in chapter 2.4, major transformations happened concerning social and political order within the country. Caste distinctions were officially abolished and secularist as well as egalitarian ideas commenced to invade the country. The old rule of correlating profession with the corresponding caste has also largely been abandoned, especially among the Khadgīs as was shown in chapter 2.4 who settled within the Kuntī area. Their caste affiliation used to classify them as butchers, but nowadays they choose from a wide range of tasks. This shows that even the sacred area of the Kumbheśvara temple compound reflects social upheavals, albeit in a much slower rate as may be the case in other departments. The old structures and hierarchical orders still remain within the compound, but subtle changes do occur once examining it more closely.

The hierarchical differences can also be demonstrated with the distribution of administrative responsibilities. Aroj Kumar Khadgi, the nephew of Indra Bahadur Khadgi, is the chairman of the Neighbourhood Development Committee and thus responsible for the distribution of the governmental money within the compound. Additionally he performs the daily puja in front of the wooden statue of Bhairava and conducts several tantric rituals within the southern part of the compound. It can thus be concluded, that while a Hindu Brahman from a Newar caste holds the “higher” ritual sovereignty within the compound, a Buddhist from the Newar caste of the Khadgīs relates with the hierarchically “lower” realms of tantra. Concerning mundane power, however, the latter can be considered more influential as he controls the major financial aspects of the compound by distributing the governmental money.

Chapter 3.4 to 3.7 presented all artefacts situated within the compound from an iconographical perspective, which revealed their origins and then places them into the contemporary context. By examining each object more closely it could be found that many god-images went through a complex process of transformation. After comparing

their original status with their contemporary one it could be shown that these two temporal meanings often do not coincide. This was demonstrated by means of the god-images of Bagalāmukhī, Kumbheśvara and Vāsukī. The most recent example is the acquisition of Bagalāmukhīs shrine as demonstrated in chapter 5.3.6, by the Newar Brahmins who thus expanded their field of influence. While the term “Sanskritization” usually denotes the process by which hierarchically lower placed castes seek a social upgrade by imitating the rituals and practises of the upper classes, it is in this case the other way around, as the Brahman priest enters the southern, and thus the “lower” realms. One may speak of a Sanskritization from above. On the other hand the priest performs Bagalāmukhī’s puja according to Vedic rules, by which he may aim towards a structural upgrading of the goddess’ social status. In order to remain within the dominant level and absorb the power over the popular shrine, it was the deity herself who had to undergo a process of Sanskritization and was turned into a goddess with a more respectable Brahmanical standard.

When looking at the history of the compound and its objects, even stronger transformations could be discovered. During the reign of the Malla kings Shrinivas and Yog Narendra, who ruled over the former kingdom of Lalitpur between 1660 and 1705, the four-faced *sanctum* of the Kumbheśvara temple used to be worshipped as Paṣupatinātha. Similarly the statue of the serpent god Vāsuki experienced a conversion of meaning, as was demonstrated in chapter 5.1. While his image once presided in the centre of the cult surrounding the inner water tank and worshipped by crowds of people, it now stands abandoned in a backside corner of the temple compound. The Brahmanical concept of Kumbheśvara ousted the indigenous *nāga*-cult and thus forms another example of transformation within the compound.

The detailed examination of these god-images, temples and shrines revealed that they can be understood as carriers of meaning, or rather as symbolically structured, but not within a rigid system. This view can be connected with the initial question concerning the differences between a sacred and a museal space. If there were no changes within the compound, caused through internal socio-political struggles of power, the space would be condemned to immobility. Being in such a state, one might as well understand the compound as a museum attraction, as the „biographies“<sup>68</sup> of its objects would take an abrupt ending. When local Newars, interviewed during the time of fieldwork, argue that

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<sup>68</sup> Kopytoff, Igor. 2001. The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In: Miller, Daniel (ed.), Consumption - Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences, Vol. III. London and New York: 9-33.

they do not enter the Patan Museum because all the objects there are dead as was mentioned in the introduction, they may in this sense speak the truth. One of these men added that the objects cannot be alive anymore, because they are not allowed to be properly venerated. The interaction between the visitors to the compound and the material god-images is thus of considerable importance for the sacred status of an object. To see the objects and temples as carriers of meaning is only partly right, because it eventually cannot explain where the power of the object comes from. The space of the Kumbheśvara temple compound becomes sacred not only because the objects exist as objects within it but also due to the interactive relationship of the visitors with them. People interact with images because of the object's ability to act upon the beholder. By mediating the actions of persons within their immediate environment, they become agents themselves. Images are thus more than just epiphenomenons because they literally look back at the beholder as was demonstrated in chapter 4.2. Images thus possess an inherent agency and can be regarded as social actors, who cut into the life of worshippers. Unlike human beings, however, they naturally do not possess their own will and can therefore only be classified as "secondary agents" that borrow their agency from external sources, and mediate it to its beholders. (Gell 1998:37)

Hence, there is no possibility of speaking of "the nature" of a venerated object from the viewpoint of anthropology. "Nothing is decidable in advance about the nature of this object, because the theory is premised on the idea that the nature of the art object is a function of the socio-relational matrix in which it is embedded. It has no 'intrinsic' nature independent of the relational context." (Gell 1998:7) But even though objects are only mediators of social agency, they can be regarded as active participants in social relations as they do perform through the material world. The immediate social other does not necessarily have to be a human being.

It is therefore not astonishing, that people develop relationships with lifeless objects. The German art historian Horst Bredekamp similarly refers to Plato's "Sophistes", which states that there is an existing truth that is connected with the image, even though it cannot possibly exist. The image is on the one hand no living being, but on the other hand it acts as its medium. For Bredekamp the logic of the image is the truth of this paradox. (Bredekamp 2010:52) It can thus be concluded that god-images do not only represent, or refer to certain prototypes. Most importantly they possess their own dimension and can therefore shape and influence the space within which they are situated.

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## Appendix



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

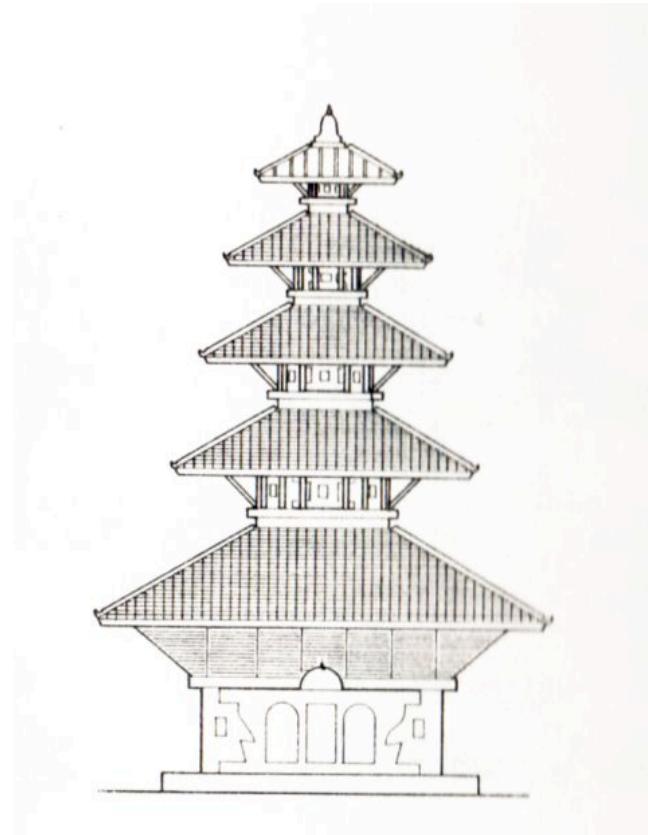


Fig. 4



Fig. 4.1



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 6.1

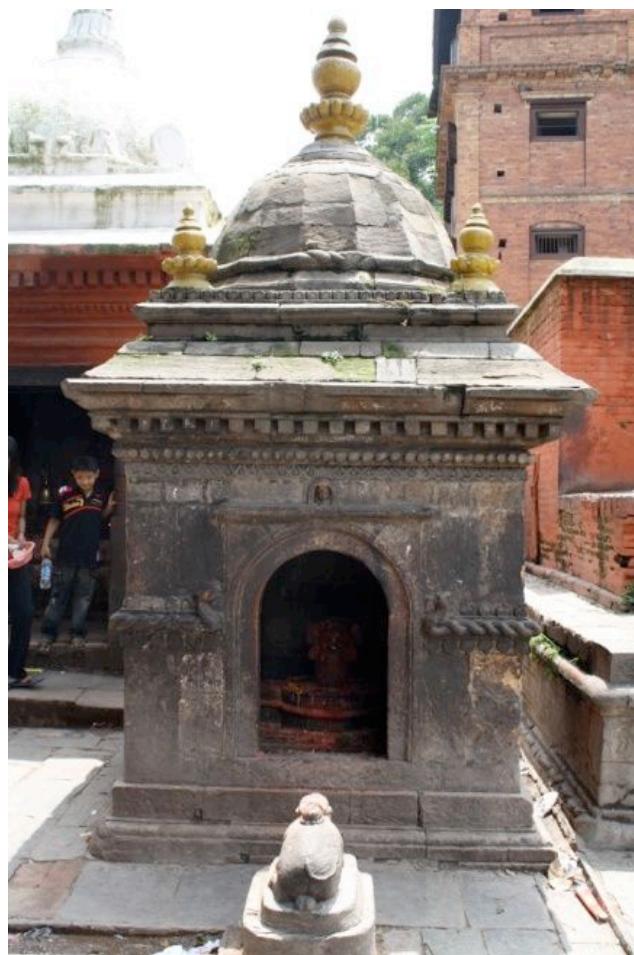


Fig. 7

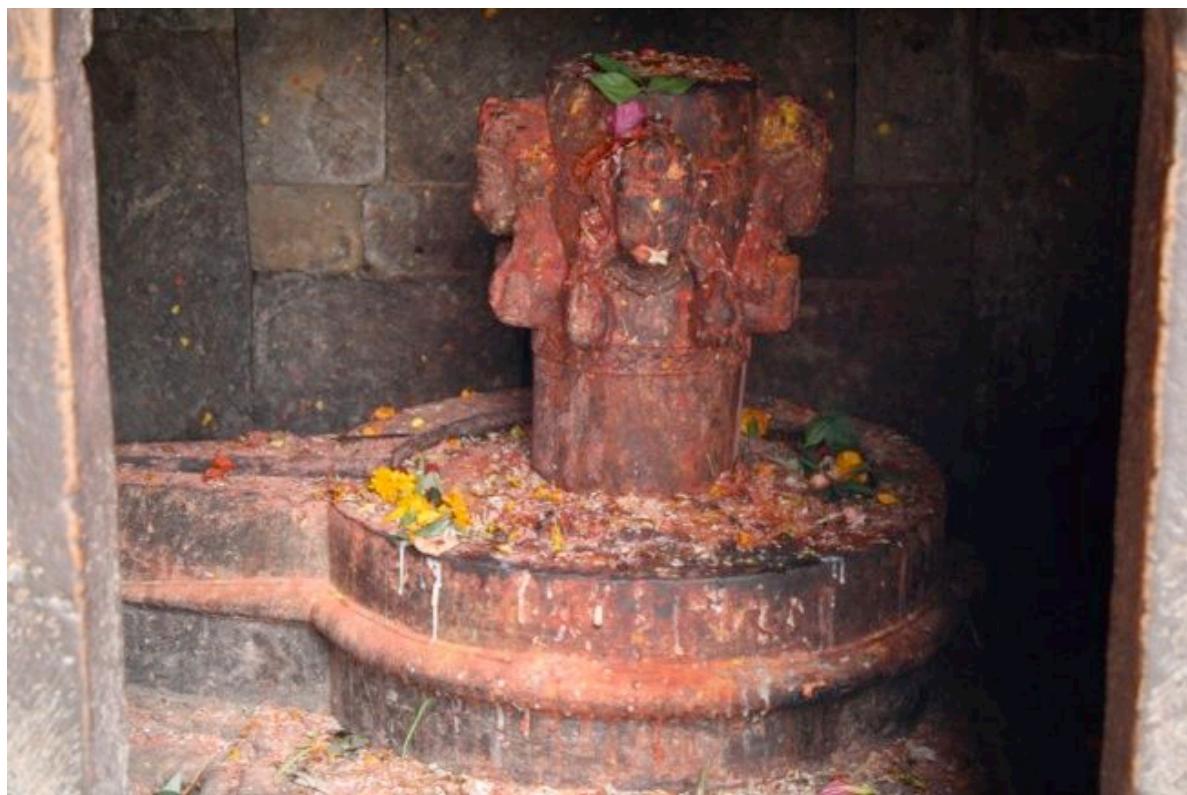


Fig. 7.1

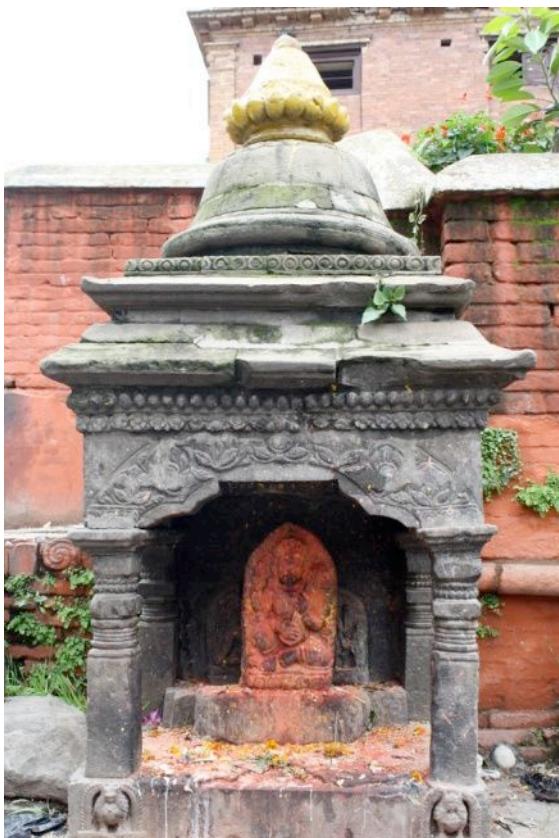


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

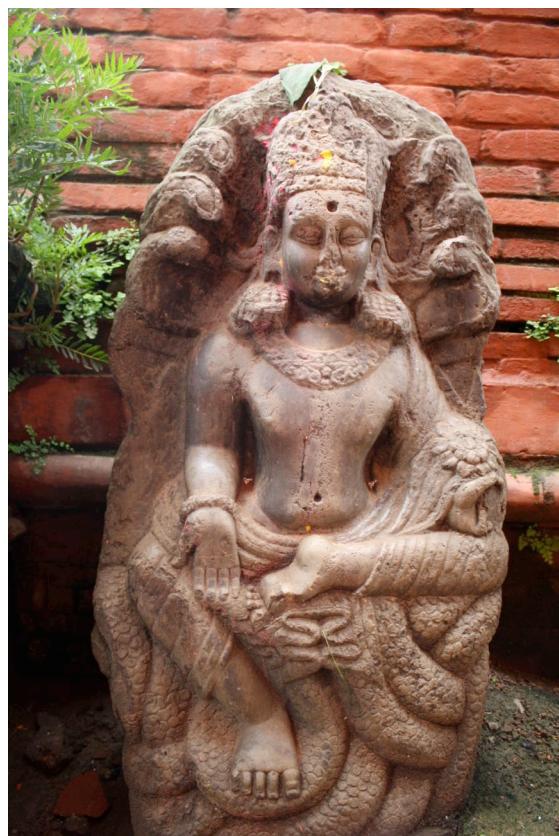


Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

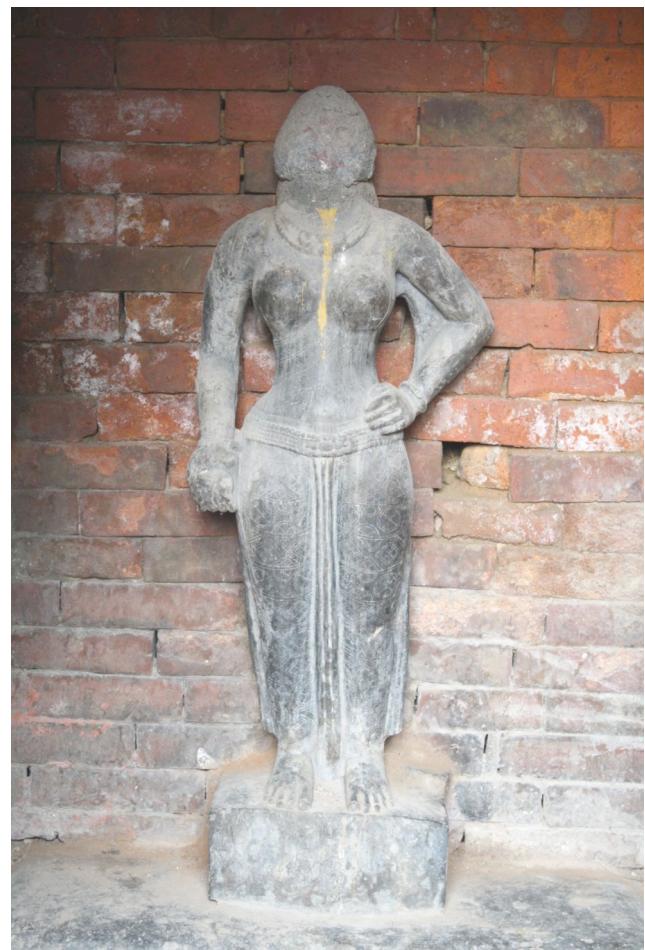


Fig. 20



Fig. 21

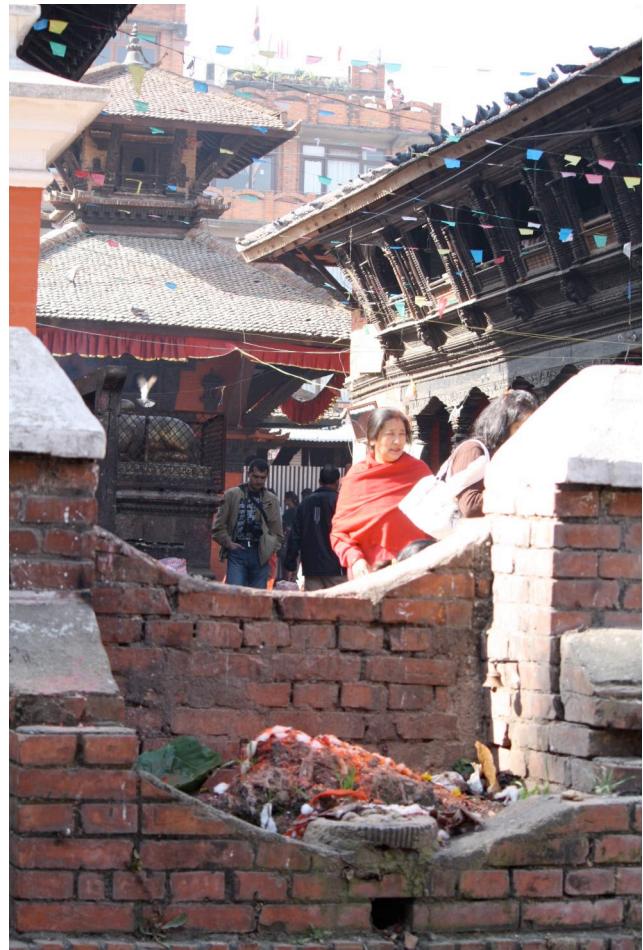


Fig. 22



Fig. 22.1



Fig. 23

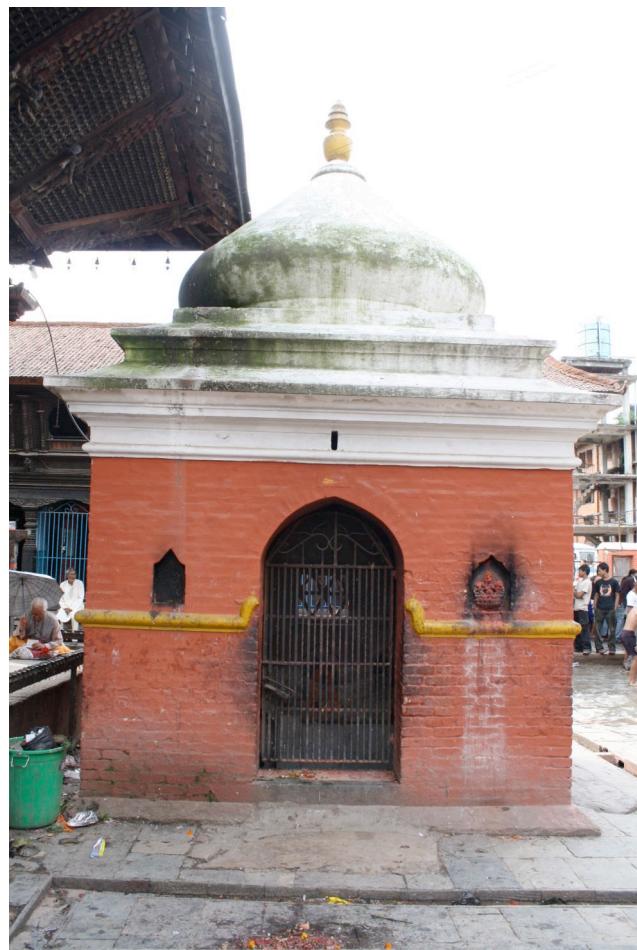


Fig. 24



Fig. 24.1



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 26.1



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 28.1



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 40.1



Fig. 41



Fig. 41.1



Fig. 41.2



Fig. 41.3

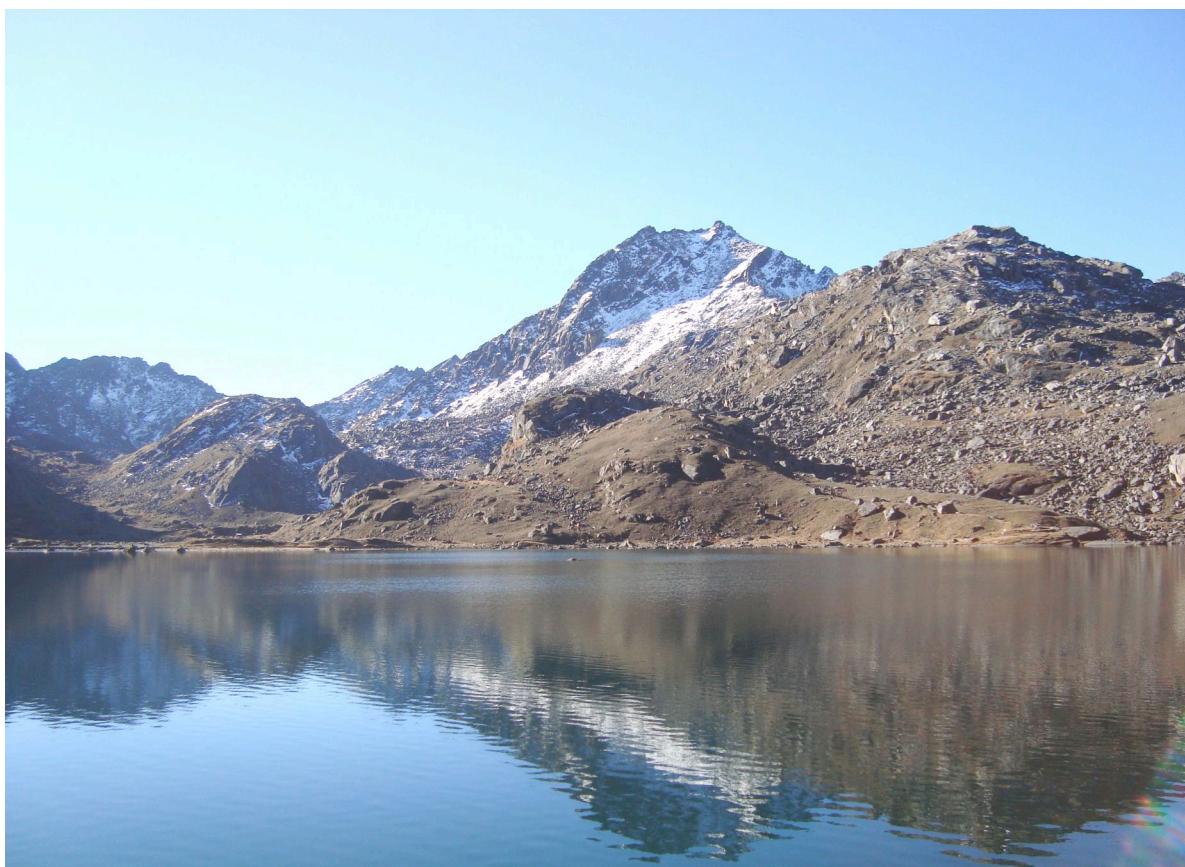


Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 46.1



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 48.1



Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

## **Kurzzusammenfassung**

Bei der vorliegenden Arbeit handelt es sich um eine detaillierte Ethnographie der Kumbheśvara Tempelanlage in Lalitpur (Patan), Nepal, mit besonderem Fokus auf deren materiellen Inhalt. Die einzelnen Tempel, Schreine und Götterstatuen werden präsentiert und ihre ikonographischen und architektonischen Besonderheiten herausgearbeitet. Des Weiteren werden die BesucherInnen sowie die MitarbeiterInnen der Tempelanlage vorgestellt und in ihren lokalen, sozio-politischen Kontext gesetzt. Die Struktur der Arbeit orientiert sich an der Frage, inwiefern die Tempelanlage als sakraler Ort bezeichnet werden kann und welche Rolle dabei die Interaktion der BesucherInnen und Priester mit den untersuchten Götterbildern spielt. Der Aufbau gliedert sich grob in zwei Abschnitte: Der erste Teil behandelt die materiellen und sozio-politischen Aspekte der Anlage, sowie die sozio-religiöse Organisation der Newar, die indigenen Einwohner des Kathmandu Tals, welche die kultischen und religiösen Angelegenheiten innerhalb der Tempelanlage leiten und die demographische Mehrheit rund um die Tempelanlage bilden. Der zweite Teil beschäftigt sich mit der Frage der „Lebendigkeit“ von Götterbildern. Einerseits in Hinblick auf einige spezifische, historisch bedingte Transformationen von Bedeutung und andererseits im Bereich der individuellen Verehrung von Götterbildern. Abschließend erfolgt die Beschreibung und Interpretation eines lokal äußerst bedeutsamen und alljährlich stattfindenden religiösen Festivals, der Kumbheśvara *melā*.

(Appendix mit Photographien der Anlage.)

## **Abstract**

The present work forms a detailed ethnography of the Kumbheśvara temple compound in Lalitpur (Patan), Nepal with a special focus on its material content. The respective temples, shrines and god-images are presented and interpreted in terms of their architecture and iconography. Furthermore, the visitors and temple authorities are introduced and located within their socio-political context. The main focus of the study is on the question, in which way the compound may be considered as a sacred space and the significance of the interactions between visitors or priests and the god images in this process are analyzed. The composition of the work can be divided into two major parts: The first

one examines the material and socio-political aspects of the Kumbheśvara temple compound, as well as the socio-religious organisation of the Newars, who dominate the cultic and religious affairs of the compound and who form the demographic majority around the area. The second part deals with the question concerning the “liveliness” of god-images. On the one hand with regard to specific, historically conditioned transformations of meaning and on the other hand in view of the individual worship of god-images. Finally, the important local annual religious festival, the Kumbheśvara *melā* is described and analyzed in detail.

(Appendix with photographies of the compound.)

# **Curriculum Vitae**

## **Persönliche Daten**

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## **Schulausbildung**

1996-2004:

1996	BG/BRG in Krems, NÖ
2002	Schüleraustausch für 6 Monate in Australien
2004	Matura

## **Studienerlauf**

2004-2010:

2004	Diplomstudium der Internationalen Entwicklung und Linguistik (bis 2005)
Seit 2005	Diplomstudium der Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie
Seit 2007 (Zweitstudium)	Diplomstudium der bildenden Kunst an der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Klasse: Bildhauerei

## **Studienschwerpunkte**

- Materielle Kultur
- Regionaler Schwerpunkt: Südasien
- Anthropologie der Kunst

## **Fremdsprachenkenntnisse**

Sehr Gute Kenntnisse: Deutsch (Muttersprache), Englisch, Französisch

Gute Kenntnisse: Portugiesisch

Basiskenntnisse: Nepali

## **Berufliche Erfahrung/Praktika/Sonstiges**

2004-2008	Teilzeittätigkeiten
Seit 2005	Mitarbeit im Weingut Bründlmayer (Präsentation bei Messen und anderen Veranstaltungen)
2007	Praktikum im Fotostudio „Fotonauta“ in Rio de Janeiro, Brasilien
2008/2009	Mitarbeit im Pilotprojekt „Hallo Nachbar,“ Feldforschung und Intervention in einem multikulturellen Klassenzimmer der Hauptschule Rzehakgasse, Wien (Organisation: Universität Wien, Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie)
August/September 2009	Feldforschung in Neu Delhi und Kolkata, Indien. Interviews mit Kuratoren und KuratorInnen des Nationalmuseums Neu Delhi und des Indian Museums in Kolkata zum Thema „Götterbilder im Museum.“
Juni 2010	Präsentation einer Filmarbeit zum Thema „Arbeiten oder nicht Arbeiten“ im Rahmen des Ethnographic and Documentary Film Festivals, Wien (ETHNOCINECA)
Februar und März 2010	Feldforschungsstipendium im Rahmen der Diplomarbeit (Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie)